

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Part One

Story of a Childhood Under the *Raj*

Pilpali Sahab

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Mulk Raj Anand



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PREFACE

In the *Bri Hadaranyaka Upanishad* the sage enjoins the disciple to ask: "Who am I?" Where have I come from? And where am I going?" But the inquiries into the self soon became the search for *Atman*, the higher Self. And it was ordained that the ego is not a free agent. Introspective analysis was discounted. Anonymity prevailed.

Only after the impact of the West did we begin to marvel at finding ourselves on the earth earthy. Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru wrote autobiographies, with much honesty, courageously facing the fact about their lives, including facts about their sensual desires.

In a confessional narrative, inspired by Iqbal's long poem *Secrets of the Self*, I made some efforts at self examination. But a friendly, though critical clinical psychologist, who read the early sections of the narrative commented: 'It is good decorative prose and well disguises the truth about the proverbial Indian mother fixation and the other distortions, which emerge in the child growing to boyhood and youth.'

So I began to put down, a more factual narrative. This may reveal, in seven parts, my growth through the various quarter and half

egos. I hope without sparing the analysis of those infantile disorders, lies and selflove, which may have become decorative prose in the fictions, and thus ignored the social evils of my inheritance.

All my efforts in the seven parts of this experiment in autobiography will be a straining towards the extraction of the truths about my life above the prevarications.

Not nostalgia but the struggle to know myself has impelled the search in these books.

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SECTION 1

Under the Shadow of Ghosts in Mian Mir

My earliest memory is of me as a spoilt child, with a big ego in a small body:

Dimly I see myself standing alone, my left thumb in my mouth on the verandah of our mudhouse: I am ready to run to the hall, though I can hardly walk: Mud walls on all sides of the courtyard: Mother sits crossed legged, with my little brother Prithvi in her lap sucking her breast: Father reading newspaper as he lies back in a long arm chair with large curved back woven with thin cane, his legs sprawled on two crossed planks, his bare feet thrust outwards on the cross frame: Des, my elder brother, silently bending over his slate by father's chair: Clayton, the tall, black, curly haired orderly of father, looking at Bakha sweeping the courtyard with his broom.

I want to be noticed.

I drop the stick horse. I go and sit by my mother. I am now sucking the thumb of my right hand in my mouth.

Mother does not look my way.

I want to cry. But, before whining, I look sideways to see if Prithvi has gone to sleep and is

not sucking mother's milk. I want to sneak into her lap and begin sucking her right breast.

But Prithvi's mouth is still on the left nipple.

I begin to sob.

'Vay kaka, your little brother is ill,' mother says. 'He needs my milk more than you! I have given you your tootiful...'

I utter a deep sigh and begin to sob and whine.

The thumb of my right hand is soiled with saliva from my half open mouth.

Mother looks away.

Then she shakes her left knee up and down slowly, to lull Prithvi to sleep.

'Ohe! No noise,' father says, as he pushes the paper away from his eyes and stares at me.

I lean onto mother for fear of father.

I see that Prithvi is already asleep, and his mouth is no longer on the left nipple.

I press mother's thigh.

'Acha—come then?' she says. 'Only for a little while. You are over three and a half—no four years now! Prithvi is only one. And he is no well...'

She puts Prithvi onto his little cot, singing to him:

'Sleep, sleep my son, sleep.'

And she strokes his torso.

'Slowly son,' she says, a frown on her forehead. I explore her breasts behind her tunic front, and get to the left nipple, soiling it with my saliva and tears.

I am content. Mother is my mother now. After denying me the nipple, she has put Prithvi away, and given me preference.

This scene was repeated everyday. And each day mother was more reluctant than the day before to let me suck her nipple, saying: 'Prithvi is shrivelling up. I must feed him.'

I would look at Prithvi's face. It was dry, squeezed and twisted. But I had no pity for him, as he either slept or cried and could not play with me.

I also did not like the look of my elder brother, Des. Because there were pale spots on his cheeks. And his ears were triangular near the lobes, while everyone else had rounded lobes. And he occupied the swing in the verandah, when he came back from school, after thrusting

me away from the wooden seat adjusted to the rope.

I would stand by one of the pillars, sucking the thumb of my left hand, waiting for father to come home from office, so that I could complain to him about Des not allowing me my turn on the swing. I knew Des wanted to be favoured by father. So I was angry with him, and said: 'Ja! Ja! 'Paleface!' He remained silent, which made me more angry. I repeated : 'Paleface '

I recognised father from his big black moustache and his husky voice, in which he gave orders to Clayton.

Mother I knew from the way she talked to me.

'Clayton', she said, 'was a flute player, bandsman of the Paltan, made orderly in the Daftar.'

Father also always spoke to Bakha, the sweeper boy, in gruff voice, exhorting him: 'Ohe! 'Clean the latrine twice a day! Not only once in the morning!' And he was harsh to my eldest brother, Hans, who came from Lahore, where he lived with mother's sister, our Massi Aqqi, to be near his school : 'Don't play with untouchable boys all the time! Study for your Matric exam!'

I was afraid of father's loud voice: So I did not go to him as eagerly I went to mother, whose voice was soft: But when father took me in his lap, and let me pull his moustache, as he sat in his armchair in the verandah on his return from office, I liked him: And I felt favoured when he asked Clayton to give me a ride on the handle of the bicycle. Also when he allowed me to go to Mali Chirag Din on the well beyond our house, where the gardener always gave me a carrot to eat. I wanted to stand between father's legs, on Sunday mornings, when there was no office. And sometimes he let me play the drum on his round tummy. And that made me look to him as my only real playmate. I felt that he was partial to me, because I could somersault without falling down, when Des always fell down. And I could mimick mother reciting her prayers. Also I could count upto twenty when my elder brother could only count upto this number, faltering all the way.

My brother Des would not play hide and seek with me. He preferred to go and play in the followers lane. I knew he had friends there:

Chotta, the flute player, Ali, the son of Abdul, the player of the big brass snake which Clayton called Clarnet, and Ram Charan, the lashless son of Gulabo, the washerwoman, Rehmat Ullah and Ismet Ullah, the sons of the Paltan's armourer, Salamat Ullah.

Sometimes I followed him at a distance, without his knowing it, to the servant's quarters nearby, in which lived the bandsmen, the washermen, the cobblers, the water carriers. And I would ask: 'May I play with you?' Des would be the first to say: 'Ja ! Ja! you will get hurt and then Ba-ji will be angry with me.'

I felt he had told the other boys not to let me join any game, on the excuse that I might get hurt. The other boys listened to him. Because he gave them some roasted gram, or nuts, or mango juice cake, from the portion he got from mother in the afternoon, when she opened the 'Oh Kuch' box. So they ignored me.

Maula Bux, the drummer of the big drum, would see this happen and he would ask me to come over to him. He would let me apply one stroke to his drum on which he was practicing. Then he asked me to run home: because Mr. Jones, the bandmaster might see him allowing me to touch the drum! Mr. Jones was a

sallowfaced Sahib: half Indian, half Angrez: a ghost like the Sahibs and yet darker than them.

My best friend, during those days, was Mali Chirag Din. He had a henna dyed goat beard. And he let me sit in his lap on the bracket of the shaft. The shaft was attached to the squeaking wheel of the well. This was attached to the big wheel. That fetched up earthen pots full of water and emptied them onto a tin tray, from its long mouth in the brick tank. From this went streams of water into the vegetable garden. Seated thus, I enjoyed going round and round the circle. I wanted soon to grow up to be a big boy, so that I could twist the tails of the bullocks who dragged the shaft around, as Mali Chirag Din hit them with a stick. And go round and round.

In order to persuade me to go home, after a little while of the pleasure of going round and round, and hearing the squeaking of the wheels, and seeing the miracle of the water coming up and rushing first in a torrent, then in streams, Mali Chirag Din gave me a carrot or a white radish, or a red radish—which last, he said: ‘The Sahab logs eat with relish.’ And he pointed to the bungalows across the road, behind a tall hedge and flowering bushes: ‘where’ the Sahabs live.’

I wondered what, the little girl, 'Baba!' daughter of Karnel Longdon Sahab, whom I could sometimes catch a glimpse of, by the Afsar's Mescot beyond the road, ate. Did she also suck her mother's breasts as I wanted to do?

Left alone, I would go to the front door and look out to the world before me: Camels walked with long legs and extended chins, tail to nose, nose to tail: Dust arose from their paws and came in thin clouds to our house: Bells of bullocks, dragging carts, tinkled below the shouts of drivers: 'Ohe may you die!' as they dug their stumps of sticks into the backs of the beasts: Now and then came army iron carts dragged by mules, driven by dark men whom mother called Poorbiyas: And from bungalows appeared Sahabs : pink white faced ghosts with sola topees on their heads, khaki shirt and shorts on their bodies, brown boots on their feet: Then an occasional sepoy orderly in uniform walked out briskly, bearing a leather bag under his arms: Always there came the smell of hot bread being baked by Khansamah inside the Mescot.

And, sucking the thumb of my left hand, I stood there spellbound by wonder itself. I wished I could go the Sahab's bungalows and ask for a double roti. Also, perchance I would find Karnel

Longdon Sahab's Baba, with her ayah, on the culvert, a pony standing by, with a poorbia syce holding the rein of the little horse, where I had seen her every day. I wished I could go and play with her. Also wanted pony like hers.

Apart from learning to play games with the followers' lane boys, by looking at them at play, and to twist the tails of the bullocks sitting on the shaft of the well as did Mali Chirag Din, I wanted to be a Sahab, to imitate their 'git mit' 'git mit' talk, their smart walk, wear a sola topee, ride a bicycle like them, and smoke 'cirguts', as the sepoys called the little white sticks in the mouths of Sahabs.

From the mention of the Sahabs, in the talk between my father and the Subedars, Jamadars, Havalendars and sepoys, who came to see him, the fact came into my little head that the Sahabs were exalted Angrez log, whom everyone salammmed. Clayton had told mother one day: 'Sahabs can uplift folk from earth to sky.' 'They can make a sepoy into a Subedar.' 'They can make Babuji referee of hockey matches between our 38 Dogra Paltan team and other Paltan

teams of Mian Mir cantonment.' 'They live in big bungalows, with large gardens, where there are many malis. 'They eat double roti, baked by Khansamah, Fakhru in the Afsar's Mescot.' 'They drink beer after hockey matches.' 'They have a Bera each, who is a sepoy promoted by the Burra Babu, from the barrack rooms to the rooms given to servants of Sahab near the Mescot.' 'They are big people...'

Mother said. 'Beef eaters! Ferungis!'

Clayton said: 'Maji, we Eessaes also eat cow's meat. It is cheaper than goat's meat. Only the Sahab's Khansamah roasts it. My Mother makes beef meat curry with rice. Mussalmans eat goat's meat. We Christian folk like the ways of the Sahabs.'

Why Mussalmans ate goat's meat and Christians ate cow's meat, I did not understand. Nor did I know why mother had abused the Sahabs as: 'Beef eaters!' 'Ferungis!' But did not abuse Mussalmans as eaters of goat meat. Perhaps because she sometimes cooked goat's meat for father.

In spite of mother's abuse, as 'Ferungis!' and 'Beef eaters!' I wanted to be a Sahab, like the Eessaes wanted to be Sahabs. And I wanted a pony like that of Karnel Londgon Sahab's Baba.

One day when I was walking behind father on the road, the Ajitan Sahab, Captain Owen, had stopped his gig on which he was riding, and asked Baji to come up and sit by him, and he had allowed me to be lifted into his lap. And, seeing my fingers touch the reins, he made me hold them, while he himself held my hands securely in his own right hand. I liked the look of Owen Sahab as he smiled at me.

As the Sahabs were seldom seen, except when they were going to office in twos on bicycles, or when the Karnel Sahab or the Ajitan Sahab rode in their gigs, I wondered what they did in their bungalows. I dared to ask father one day. He said: 'They are Sahabs. They have chotta hazri when they wake up. They bath in tubs with hot water. They have burra hazri with pig's meat and eggs and double roti and tea. They go to office at nine o'clock. Except for Karnel Sahab who comes at ten o'clock. They go back and have midday meal called lunch. They sleep for an hour. They go to play hockey or tennis in the afternoon. In the evening, they drink whiskey or beer. Then they dress in special black clothes for evening meal called dinner.'

Later they play gramophone, and dance with Mems in Mesrot. Or read books.'

'Why don't we do all that?' I asked.

My father smiled at my naivete.

I persisted with my Whys, asking 'why not?' 'Baji—why not.'

He said: 'They are our afsars. And we are their servants.'

'I want to be an afsar,' I said

'Acha,' father said, 'Now you go and ride on your stick horse.'

'No, I want to go on the swing,' I said.

He got up and put me on the swing and gave me a gentle push.

From that day onwards I secretly wished to go and see for myself how the Sahabs lived. Perhaps I could go and play with Karna Longdon Sahab's little daughter, who seemed to be my size, as I saw her with black poorabia Ayah, who brought her to the culvert beyond the big road, in a flowing white dress and little white sola topee, seated on a small pony led by a syce. And I began to steal out of the house in the evenings, to see if the Ayah and the little girl, with the golden hair, were there, with the pony and the syce.

For days they did not appear. I guessed the girl's mother, Karnel Longdon Sahab's Mem, had told the Ayah not to go near the big road, as my mother had also warned me not to go anywhere near there.

So I had a fantasy. If I could ask Clayton to ask father to get me the little son of the donkey of the washerwoman, Gulabo, I could go riding on it towards Longdon Sahab's bungalow, and meet the Baba who would be riding her pony. Father would never buy me a pony. The little donkey whom I had seen sucking his mother's teats for milk, seemed so frisky that he would run faster than Baba Longdon's pony.

I asked Clayton : 'Bring me the son of Gulabo's donkey—as father will not get me a pony like that of Longdon Sahab's Baba's pony.'

'Little brother, that donkey cub will not let you ride on its back. He will shake you off and run away.'

'No' I insisted. 'If mother gives him a chapati, he will come near. Then you can catch him.'

'Acha. I will show you that he wont be caught.'

Clayton bore me to the well near the followers lane, where Gulabo had taken the donkey-mother loaded with clothes.

There was the little donkey wanting to suck his mother's teats. while the mother was keeping him away with her snuzzle.

Clayton put me down and went to catch the little donkey. He first approached the mother, patted her forehead and gave her a bunch of grass he had picked up from the pile Gulabo had brought and put by the washing ghat slab.

Then he slowly went towards her little son.

The little donkey saw the shadow of Clayton and ran away.

'Leave him alone.' Gulabo shouted 'He will kick you and smash your face.'

Clayton came back, picked me up and said:

'Little brother, I told you the cub won't be caught.'

'Acha, I will go and ask the Ayah if I can ride the Baba's pony,' I said.

One day I caught a glimpse of the Ayah and the golden haired girl on the drive by which

Ajitan Sahab's gig entered the bungalow, beyond the culvert.

My body quivered with excitement. I must go and see them. Perhaps the Ayah would let me play with the girl. I had seen the girl holding a doll. I fancied if I could make friends with the syce, as also Ayah (mother called her black Mem Sahab), I may ask for a ride on the pony. I looked this side and that, to see if Mali Chirag Din, who was appointed by father and mother to keep a watch on my movements, was about. No. He was not on the well.

This was my opportunity.

Impetuously, I ran across the road, after looking on the right hand side where only some donkeys, carrying bricks, were raising dust, as they raced along and a row of camels was going, tail to nose, nose to tail, ambling along.

I got to the culvert.

I saw that the Ayah was near the verandah of the Mescot bungalow, with her back towards me, as she pushed the perambulator ahead of her with the golden haired girl sitting in it.

I would have raced up.

But I saw a sepoy with a rifle standing guard by the verandah. And at the entrance of

the Mescot were two big black guns. I had been told by Ajitan Sahab's orderly, Hari Singh, they could go off as the powder balls in them had not been taken out since they were captured from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's fort in Lahore.

I was frightened of the large guns. I had heard mother say she hoped they would go off and kill the Ferungis. Because the Goras had stolen them from the Sikh army 'My father and my grandfather,' she had said, 'had fought against the Gora Foj. My grandfather had been killed in the battle of Chelhanwal.' I wondered about that fight. I had not understood much of what she had said. Why did sepoys fight? My brother Des had told me he and Chotta and Ali had seen how the Rengroots learnt to dig bayonets into the sacks hanging from bars. I must go and see them. When I became big I wanted to be a Rengroot and fight.

If I could not get to play with the golden haired girl, I must bring something from the Mescot.

I stepped on to the rose patch.
I saw some fullblown roses
Red, Yellow. White roses blurred before my
eyes.

I stretched out my right hand to a rose. I caught the thorns. The petals of the yellow rose fell away.

I shrieked.

A sepoy rushed up from the verandah and caught me.

He stared at me with red eyes.

Then he mellowed and asked me:

'Munnoo—are you Babu Lal Chand's son.'

I began to cry, then nodded.

He picked me up under his right arm.

I shrieked and wanted to be put down.

He had me firmly in his grasp, dangling under his armpit, and he said:

'You are not to come near the Sahab logs bungalows. They don't like noise.'

Mali Chirag Din heard my shrieks.

He rushed up and took me from the sepoy.

'Ohe, you must not cross the road!' he rebuked me, as he rushed towards our house. 'You may be run over, son, by a tonga. Or be crushed under a camel's foot!'

As he knocked the latch on the door, I howled to save myself from mother's reprimand.

But father came to the door instead of mother,

‘He had gone into the Mescot garden Babuji,’ Mali Chirag din said.

Father gave me a light slap, saying: ‘The Sahabs will be angry with me if one of my sons goes and disturbs them. They think we bring diseases into their bungalows. And they don’t like their afternoon sleep disturbed by shouting and shrieking and weeping children.’

I howled.

Mother took me from him, scolding me in soft words. And she put me to sleep in my cot next to Prithvi’s cot.

From that time onwards my curiosity about the Sahabs, Mem Sahabs and their ‘Baba log,’ as their children were called, became a kind of unease, akin to fear, with the secret longing that I should also be considered one of the Baba logs, even if I was the son of a Babu.

As I was not wanted by anyone, neither by the boys of the followers lane, nor by the Ayah of Karnel Longdon Sahab’s daughter, nor by the Mescot servants, I wanted all the time to come back to mother’s lap.

But now she was feeding Prithvi five times a day. She had him in her lap. She was singing him to sleep. But he would not sleep. He moaned. He cried. And sometimes he shrieked. I noticed that he was shrivelled up, so that his cheeks were hollow.

Mother would push me away and say : 'Go and ride on your stick horse!' Or she would give me some monkey nuts as a compensation for the denial of her breast.

But I was not to be appeased.

I was so jealous of Prithvi that one day I tried to tear him away from her left breast, till his head fell on her knees and he shrieked.

Mother smacked my bottom. I began to howl. Just then father happened to come. And, on being told what had happened, he shouted:

'Ohe Budmash! You will kill your little brother if you do that again! You are nearly five! You are not to suck your mother's milk! She has hardly any milk for that dying child.'

I lay down on the floor of the verandah and rolled in the dust, sobbing! 'I want my mother! I want my mother!'

At that father growled: 'Ohe chup!'

Mother got up, put Prithvi away in his cot, and took me in her lap.

Their querulous voices came into my ears. I wanted to play with father. And I had annoyed him. I felt ashamed. If I had not made him angry, I could have pulled his moustache—which he allowed me to do if I was a good boy and not sulking. Mother patted me to sleep.

One afternoon when I woke up from my siesta, I found Clayton seated at the foot of my bed.

There was utter silence in the verandah. Then a sparrow chirped. And some crows caw cawed at the end of the verandah.

‘Ma?’ I cried.

‘Ma has gone on a visit,’ Clayton said.

Babuji asked me to take you to Mescot where Khansamah Fakhru has made a cake for you, on Babuji’s order.’

‘Will Baji be there?’

‘Let us go there and see. I will give you a ride on the cycle... And tomorrow is our Eessai

Bura Din. My mother asked me to bring you home.'

'I want my mother,' I insisted and shouted:
'Ma!

As there was no answer, I began to cry.

'Come! Come! That cake is waiting for you. And Longdon Sahab's Mem Sahab told Babuji to send you to play with her Baba...'

I was tempted.

Clayton picked me up and put me on the bicycle bar. We went off.

Outside our door, Mali Chirag Din was seated on a stool. This seemed strange to me. He never left his work to come and sit outside our house.

'I am going to eat cake, I said to him.

'Sweeter than my carrots, son,' he said.

As Clayton drove into the Mescot compound, the Mali of the Sahab's garden salaamed him and me.

I was elated.

I could soon smell the rich smell of the oven room where Khansamah Fakhru baked bread.

Clayton rang the cycle bell. Then he asked me to ring the bell. I rang, again and again,

joyfully. And when Fakhru appeared, with his white turban and coat and red cummerband, I rang more happily.

‘Yeh lo-cake!’ he said, offering me a warm round packet. And from a plate he offered a chunk to me and one to Clayton.

‘You also taste,’ Clayton said.

‘We Khansamahs eat the taste while cooking. We don’t need to eat food very much.’

While he was explaining, I bit a mouthful of the luscious cake. Then a second mouthful. And my mouth swelled.

‘Slowly son,’ Clayton said. ‘The Sahabs like to eat slowly. Without making noise as our folk do. And we must learn to behave like them.’

I wiped my mouth after I had swallowed another chunk. And he picked me up and carried me towards Karnel Longdon Sahab’s bungalow.

Tall Karnel Longdon Sahab, with a smiling face, was just about to mount his horse.

Clayton clicked his heels and salammmed him. Then he presented me: ‘Son of Babu Lal Chand!’

‘Come,’ the Sahab said.

I followed and saw on the opposite wall heads of animals. I was frightened and stood.

Karnel Sahib patted me on the head. Then he went into the bungalow and brought his little golden haired daughter, a paper bag in his hand. He asked the girl to shake hands with me. She was reluctant. But Karnel Sahab helped her. Then he gave her the bag to give to me. After she had handed over the bag, Karnel Longdon said to Clayton and me: 'Salaam!'

Not too tall, but still tall, Karnel Longdon Sahab's Mem Sahab, came out, dressed in a long gown. Her hair was tied into a bun on top unlike my mother's bun at the back of the head. She came smiling and said:

'Happy Christmas!'

Clayton 'salaamed' her after clicking his heels.

: 'You also salaam!' he said to me.

'Karnel Sahab mounted his horse, whom the syce was holding by the strap.

I salaamed the Sahab, with Clayton lifting my righthand to my forehead.

I was hot with excitement to see what was in the bag.

Clayton salaamed the shadows of the Sahab, picked me up in his arms, salammmed to

Mem Sahab and the little girl and the Ayah and put me on the bicycle.

On reaching home, I found mother and her sister, my aunt Aqqi, weeping, with their heads joined together, as they sat opposite each other.

I sat down and opened the cardboard box and shouted to Clayton: 'Look, toys! Also big cake.'

Clayton said:

'Your brother Prithvi has gone.

'Where has he gone?' I asked.

He did not answer.

Father emerged from the big room.

'Look Baji—toys: Elephant: Camel: Train—Karne! Sahab's baba gave me.'

'And Fakhru Khansamah has sent a cake Babuji,' Clayton added.

'Ma—look, toys! Sahab gave me... And cake...'

'Son take the toys with you,' said my mother. 'Go and play with Clayton.' Her face was twisted. Her eyes were dripping with tears.

I began to sob.

Clayton bore me away, even though I wriggled.

‘Where has Prithvi gone?’ I asked him again.

‘Gone to God. Become a jinn—a little bhoot! Don’t cry. Or he will come and catch you by the throat.’

I did not understand where Prithvi had gone. Where was God?

And how my little brother could become a jinn, of whom I should be afraid. And, inspite of mother’s and aunt Aqqi’s wails, I felt that, as Prithvi had gone away, from now on I would be able to lie in mother’s lap and suck her breasts all the time.

‘We are going to my house,’ Clayton said .
My mother will give you cake’.

Clayton’s house in the follower’s lane was next to the house of Mr. Jimmy’s the Clarinet player. And Mr. Jimmy’s house was next to the house of Mr Jones, the sallow faced Band Master.

The doors of all the three nouses were decorated with manicoloured paper flower chains.

Clayton's mother had asked us to her home: Mr. Jimmy's little daughter. Helen, who was a little bigger than me, her elder brother Tom, with coal black face. Mr. Jones' tall daughter, Mary, Chotta, the flute player, my brother Des, Ram Charan, the son of Gulabo the washerwoman, and Ali the son of Abdul the small drum player. A bench from the daltar had been made into a table. And we are all given moora stools, big and small, to sit in front of plates, with knives and forks borrowed from the Mescot Khansamah, Fakhru. Clayton's mother brought a big bird on a huge plate, with potatoes and greens around it. And she signed to her son to serve.

Clayton took a big knife and tongs and cut slices and put them on each plate, with potatoes and vegetables.

'Now' he said 'learn to eat Christmas lunch like Sahabs, with forks and knives. And you may rise to become Sahabs. My special little brother, Mulky, will eat with me.'

Before he had spoken, the boys had picked up the food before them in their hands and were biting big chunks.

Chotta, Ali and Ram Charan, even picked up the portions from the little girl's plates and

munched, even as they uttered mock cries of pleasure.

Clayton shouted:

‘Manners! You will never become Sahabs.’

Only Des, Tom and Mary were trying to use forks and knives, but could not cut.

Clayton said:

‘Acha, eat with your fingers—with three fingers and not five. And wash your hand with hot water as Sahabs do, to take off the grease afterwards. Learn to behave if you want to rise above the ‘natus’ whom the Goras abuse: “You who relieve yourself on the ground,” to the status of Sahabs who relieve themselves in commodes.

‘Sale!’ Chotta abused him. ‘We are poor! Sahabs are rich.’

‘Not so the Goras!’ Clayton said. ‘They are poor, but they have been taught good manners.’

‘They are rogues!’ said Ram Charan ‘They shout abuse ‘Bleddy fool!’ ‘Bleddy fool!’ They don’t bath for days. My mother finds their clothes, which come for wash, dirty. She has to spend extra money on soap. They are white monkeys.’

‘Sale!’ Chotta said, ‘they get more pay than our sepoys and even Holdars and Jamadars and

Subedars! And they smoke good cigarettes—not Red Lamp cigarettes like our sepoys!’

‘Don’t call me Salé Or I shall show you!’ said Ram Charan. And he nearly got up to fight Chotta.

Clayton stood up from where he was feeding me and shouted:

‘I will pulp You if you don’t behave!’

Clayton’s mother came with a big cake in a large plate and said:

‘Those who are good will get two chunks. The Budmashes will get only one each.

Silence was restored for a while.

Then Chotta snatched Ram Charan’s portion. Whereupon Ram Charan gripped him.

Clayton got up and shouted:

‘Chup! - you will never be Sahabs!’ And, putting me in his mother’s lap, he went and separated them. ‘Out all of you and play gulli danda! Natus! You will never learn to play hockey or Kirkat or football!’

‘All goras have canes in their hands! They shoo us away! Also dogs!’ brother said.

‘You are junglis according to the Sahabs’.

‘So are Goras!’ Ram Charan shouted.

After the Burra Din dinner, Clayton's mother put me to sleep on her own big bed.

I felt I had already, under Clayton's care, learnt to behave like the Baba log of the Sahabs. I might be able to imitate them, if father could acquire a commode in our house, in the place of our earth latrine. Then the Gora's jibe: "You who shit on the ground!" would not apply to me.

In the evening Mr. Jimmy called the same members of the lunch party to dinner.

Earning less pay than Clayton, he had got a big leg of cow's meat.

Des asked: 'Is this cow's meat?'

Mrs. Jimmy said: 'Han-we are poor folk and cannot afford a bird!'

'My mother will tell me off for eating mother-cow's flesh,' Des said. 'So I will go home.' And he got up to go.

'My mother also will be angry,' said Ram Chai n.

'Ja! Sale!' shouted Chotta. 'You eat dirt everywhere. And your mother goes to all the Afsars. Anyhow, you are outcaste for the sepoys. And you are showing off as a Brahmin!'

'Sale, don't abuse me!' the dhobi boy shouted. 'I am higher caste than you Chistians. And, before we knew what was up, he had gipped Chotta. Then Chotta gripped him by the neck.

Mr. Jimmy and Clayton pushed them and left them outside the house.

And then a Padre Sahab came, sat down at the head of the table, and mumbled some prayers, and everyone ate quietly.

We children were cowed into silence. Clayton noticed that. So he brought some fireworks and let them off in the courtyard. And we shouted and raved with happiness to see the sparks flying off and the colours of fire forming and reforming.

Mr. Jones came out with father, Subedar Major Garka Singh, and Kramat Ullah, eldest son of armou Salamat Ullah, to watch the fireworks.

Father was smelling of liquor, as mother often said he did, "whenever he went to eat the ashes"

But he was very affectionate and kissed me, as he took me up from Clayton's arms and bore me home, already asleep on his shoulder.

The Christmas parties in the two Christian households were strange experiences for little me. I sensed that those 'natus' who became Eessaes had no touchables and untouchables like us Hindus had. Father never allowed Bakha to touch his feet, though the sweeper boy said: 'I fall at your feet'. I wanted to touch Bakha and play with his broom and learn to sweep the courtyard like him. But mother always warned me that I would have to take bath if I touched Bakha, his broom, or his basket. Was this because the outcastes also ate cow's meat? Like the Sahabs did? Des had walked away from Mr. Jimmy's house, because he said mother would be angry. And yet father may have eaten cow's meat in Mr. Jone's house. from which he had come out smelling of Sharab.

Anyhow, I decided to learn to be a Sahab and to learn their customs by frequenting the houses of the Christians in the follower's lane.

Next morning I found a man, with a face like that of our Baji, but of sallow colour, snoring on a bed near father's.

A woman, taller than mother, of fair face, was seated on a Moora stool combing her long hair, while a little baby slept in her lap.

‘Join hands to Chachi Devki’, Des said to me.

I did not do so, because my elder brother had asked me. I did not like his pale flat face, as also because he was always advising me not to be naughty, and as people called him a ‘good boy’ and me a ‘budmash’.

‘Ao! Ao!-come to me, son,’ the fair woman said.

I shyly went to her.

She took me in her arms and kissed me on the forehead.

‘Your name is Mulky?’ Is it not?’

I nodded coyly, but said:

‘Acha...I am your Chachi. This is your Chacha. I am going to make you my son. I have no son. Only this daughter, Kaushalya.’

Mother looked hard at me, as she swept the verandah with a broom. Then she said:

‘Someone has taken my Prithvi away-by doing magic.’

Chachi Devaki hugged me and remained silent. Then she asked mother:

‘Sister, what was Prithvi ill with?’

‘Just shrivelled up,’ mother said. ‘They say Tapdik!’

‘Never mind. you will soon have another son. God has given you three. I have no son yet.’

‘Maybe you will not be able to play cards with Piaru and others if you have another child,’ mother said.

I remember the flush which came onto Chachi Devaki’s face, and how she hung her head down. I sensed that mother was angry with Devaki. I did not know why.

Mother turned away from Chachi Devaki

I guessed she did not want to talk to her any more.

And as mother did not sit weeping with her, as she had sat with her own sister, Massi Aqqi, I sensed that she did not want her sympathy on Prithvi being taken away from her.

Chachi Devaki began to knit some wool with two long needles.

‘Go and play with your brother Des,’ mother said. ‘Desea call him. Show him those little kittens which the cat has given in the deorhi.’

At the mention of the kittens, I ran to Des.

In a basket next to Bakha's basket, in a corner of the hall, were three kittens. Des held one mewling kitten in his left hand.

'Give me one,' I said.

'Acha. But I will have two. I am bigger than you.'

I nodded. And he gave me a kitten from a basket in the corner of the hall.

I was frightened to hold it. And yet I wanted to hold it.

The kitten's eyes were closed. This made me more frightened. I nearly threw it down.

'Don't do that! It will die!' Des said. 'Let us go out of the house. The cat may come and she will scratch us for taking her babies away.'

I went out excitedly, ahead of him.

'I want to show it to Mali Chirag Din.'

And I proceeded towards the well.

Mali Chirag Din was some way away, picking carrots and radishes for the Sahabs.

'Chachaji! See what I have!' I shouted and ran to him.

The kitten mewed faintly.

‘Chachaji!, touch it—it is soft’

‘The Mali took it, stroked it and gave it back to me, saying:

‘Ask your mother to give it some milk. Go, be a good boy.’

I came back caressing the kitten.

Des wa near the well.

‘Mali Chirag Din likes my kitten,’ I told him. He says. ask mother to give him some milk.”

‘Acha, bulet us show the kittens their faces in the water.’

He held his kittens across the wall of the well.

I did the same.

‘The kittens mewed.

‘Mother says the cat gives too many kittens,’ Des said. ‘We have no milk to give them. Or to the cat. You throw yours in the well. I will throw one of mine. Then only one will be left.’

Just then the kitten in my hand was mewing and scratching my hand. I threw it into the well.

‘Throw yours,’ I said to Des.

‘No,’ he said and ran,back home, shouting:

‘Ma! Look what he has done! Thrown the kitten into the well!’

Mother came to the door.

‘Vay-what have you done! Hai! you have committed a sin! let me see! Where?’

She came across the well near which I stood weeping.

Mother slapped my head-picked me up, and took me inside the house.

The cat was mewling in the corner.

I stood crying.

‘Give her the two kittens, Vay!’ mother shouted to Des.

The cat still mewed.

‘Look she is weeping for her dead kitten. Now we will have to give a silver kitten to the temple. Otherwise God will punish you for your sin.’

I was sobbing from the slap on my head. I began to howl from the fear of God, who might take me as he had taken Prithvi.

Chachi Devaki took me up from where I stood rubbing my eyes.

‘Never mind. son, your Chachaji will make a silver kitten to give to the Temple.’

I still sobbed, as the moment of throwing the kitten came back into my eyes, with the echo of the sound of mewing in my ears.

Chacha Piaru woke up from the noise. He heard the story and said:

‘Acha, I will make a silver kitten for you to give to the temple. And he turned to mother and said: ‘Let one of these boys come to Amritsar and fetch it.’

‘We came to mourn one death,’ said Chachi Devaki. ‘Now there is another.’

When they left that afternoon, I was asleep in the hall.

As I woke up I asked mother: ‘Where is Chachi Devaki.’

‘Gone to Amritsar. May she die!’

I began to cry.

Father came from office, picked me up, took me to Mali Chirag Din. ‘Let us go and get some greens!’ he said.

‘Carrot for me’ I said.

And I was all smiles.

One evening, when I came back from Clayton’s mother’s house, after playing with Helen, I found mother with another baby in her lap.

‘Come, look at your little brother,’ mother said.

I stood away staring at the little quivering bundle, with the thumb of my left hand in my mouth. I wanted to cry from the anticipation of being deprived of my mother’s teats again

‘Ao, son.’

I shook my head in disgust.

She dragged me onto her left lap.

I allowed myself to lie down, I even held the baby’s foot.

She was stroking the little one’s head.

‘Come and fondle him.’

I waved my head to say no.

Then I suddenly took the baby’s foot and bit it.

The little one cried.

‘Vay cruel one!’ Mother shrieked. And she thrust me away.

I rolled on the ground as I sobbed: ‘Why has Prithvi come back?’

‘Son, God has given him back to us.

I did not know how it had all happened. How Prithvi had disappeared. And then come back. I sulked and rolled on the ground, till I heard father’s voice, giving orders to Clayton to fetch the newspaper from the Mescot. Then I lay and pretended to be asleep.

‘Why is he lying on the floor?’ Father growled. And he picked me up, dusted my clothes and put me on the bed.

I had learnt to be cunning and kept up the pretence that I had been asleep, to escape the slap on the face.

Soon after the arrival of the baby, one afternoon, my eldest brother Hans came from where he stayed to be near his school in Lahore in aunt Aqqi’s house, and Des came back from Uncle Piaru’s and aunt Devaki’s house in Amritsar.

Father said with a smile to Mother.

‘Tara Bai’s circus has come to Lahore, I will take the boys there. Let the period of mourning for Prithvi be over, now that a new baby has come. We did not observe the Basant Festival. Or go to the Baisakhi fair. Let us go to the circus.’

And he turned to me:

‘Ohe Bud.nash! You want to see elephant riding a bicycle?’

‘Han-Baji! Han! Let us go!

‘Let me go to do Tatti and wash my face... Mother of Hans, when Clayton comes ask him to bring a tonga.’

I was trembling with excitement. Mother washed my face and dressed me in newly washed kurta-pyjama.

Des, whose face was to be washed before mine, began to write something on his slate, because he knew I would sulk if I was not attended to first.

Hans, who had already washed his face and had his milk and biscuits, was ready, seated on a charpai, dressed in Angrezi style shirt with collar and trousers and rubber shoes.

And he turned to me:

Father came out of’atti, washed his hands and face, and sat in his arm chair, drinking milk, which mother gave him every afternoon.

I went up to him and stood between his legs. He gave me a sip of the milk.

Clayton came and said: ‘I have brought a Tonga!’

Have you asked the Tongawalla-how much?"

'Han-Babuji! He wants five rupees.'

'Tell him three rupees.'

Clayton went out.

Father went into the big room and came back with a scarf on his neck and his cane with the silver head on the top in his hand.

'Ohe?' he asked the Tongawalla. 'have you a license to ply in the cantonment? Han-ya-na?'

The Tongawalla shook his head, shamefacedly.

'Then come to daftar tomorrow and I will give you a license. And it is three rupees to Mian Mir, not five!—Chalo'

I looked at father's big moustachio, which seemed to have frightened the tongawalla. And from then on, I felt I could not pull that moustachio, as he was a big Babu of the Paltan, who could order anyone and everyone. I remembered the upward twirl of father's moustachio always. The moustache was frightening like father's frown.

I guessed there were Sahabs and Subedars and Jamadars and Holdars and big Babus and

small Babus, and there were sepoy's like Clayton and rangroots.

And they had different kinds of moustachios. Subedar Major Garka Singh had a lion moustache and a beard tied tight in a net. Other Afsars had upturned moustachios. And the sepoy's and bandsmen had moustaches which came down onto the sides of their mouths. The Indian officers had moustachios which were brief and pointed.

As son of a big Babu, I knew I was exalted and sat in a 'Tonga when the boys of the follower's lane had to walk. They were not only semi-untouchables, but inferior to Babus, the learned people, and Dogras who were of the superior fighting caste.

I noticed specks of dust arise from the road from under the paws of camels on the left hand side track. Mother had said that ghosts rose from the dust in the evening. I wondered if the ghost of Prithvi would suddenly cry out and accuse me of depriving him of Mother's breasts. Mother had said his ghost came to her in her dreams.

Suddenly, everyone who was invisible seemed to me to be a ghost. The Sahabs in the bungalows were not to be seen, so they were

ghosts. More so because they were pink coloured.

As we passed by the grave of a Pir by which sat a Fakir, with a green turban on his head, I looked in the shadows for Prithvi's ghost, beyond the swelling of a grave Massi Aqqi had talked of the Saint Main Mu's ghost roaming around Lahore, because his tomb near Anarkali was neglected. If the cantonment area was called Mian Mir, I wondered if this giant ghost was looking at us, from the angry red sky of the evening.

My breath came and went quickly. I looked away towards the crest of bright feathers on the head of the Tonga horse. I wanted to forget the ghosts. But even when I lost myself in the horse's bright plumes, I felt the ghost of Mian Mir waiting somewhere on the side, holding the weeping ghost of Prithvi in his arms.

'If we die,' I asked father, 'do we all become jinn-bhoots, as mother says?'

He evaded my question and said:

'Your mother should not talk to you about jinns and bhoots! Look at the lights!... There-there in the Chiriva-ghar garden!-There is Tara Bai circus!...Soon we shall be in the Chiriy-

Ghar where there are parrots and monkeys and lions and elephants.'

The tonga moved on.

But the fear of the ghost of Prithvi was still in me. The stalks of maize in the field seemed to me like so many ghosts. And, as the dark became darker, I felt now all those ghosts, would come crowding on to me. I suddenly began to rub my eyes where the tears of fear had come and I sobbed: 'Ma!'

Father took me on his knees.

'There,' he said, 'there is the circus!'

'I want to see the parrots and monkeys and lions and elephants.' I said.

'They have gone to sleep. You will see lions and elephants in the circus.'

I could see the huge tent. And people were crowding round a window. And a picture showed a woman with a long chabuk in her hand, teaching a lion to sit on a stool!

And there was the noise of a band playing.

I was now so excited I wanted to run into the tent, but Clavton held me.

Soon I saw a huge light at the entrance of the tent.

A funny man with a Kullah cap on his head, red blob on his nose, big striped coat and salvars, was lowering children into the boot and out.

‘Clown!’ father said.

Des went towards the boot. The clown lifted him and lowered him in the boot.

I wanted to be put into the boot also and shouted: ‘Put me in the boot!’

Father smiled at the man. And he took out Des and put me in. I could not breathe as it was dark in the boot; I shouted: ‘Take me out! Take me out!’

And I was lifted up.

‘One anna for each dip!’ the clown said.

‘You did not say there was a fee!’ father rebuked him. But Hans paid up two annas.

Somehow, the image of that huge boot is a memory which is one of the most vivid of my childhood of my wanting to be put in it and then immediately wanting to be taken out. I hated to be confined. From those early Mian Mir days, I wanted to run across the vast space of the Paltan’s parade ground. I wanted to roam in the open space of the parade ground near our house.

As we entered the big tent, a girl was walking on a rope.

People clapped.

Then a baby elephant rode on a huge bicycle.

I clapped even before he had finished.

Everyone clapped.

'There Tara Bai! Riding a tiger! Chabuk in her hand!' Father said. 'She owns the whole circus.'

Though the tiger filled me with terror, as he growled, I wanted to be like Tara Bai one day, to ride a tiger.

Then I wanted to be like the man who stood on the horse as the horse ran, somersaulted several times while the horse ran round and round, and at last somersaulted off the horse, doing several somersaults on the ground without stopping, until people clapped.

After that, before the next tricks, I had dozed off. I only remember father shouting at me: 'Wake up! Silly boy! See Tara Bai lifting a huge stone!'

I cried out: 'Ma'!

I heard father's harsh voice saying: 'You wanted to come to the circus! And now you want

to sleep without seeing all the tricks! You are a spoilt child! Your mother is too soft with you.'

I knew this was so. But I also sensed that, because I was small and was considered to be a nuisance, mother was the only person to whom I could cling. And she allowed me to be in her lap always after a few rebukes.

My longing to be taken to the circus, or to Mescot, or to a hockey match, where father went to blow the whistle as referee, became a daily whinesong to father as soon as he returned from office.

'Tarabai Circus has gone to Ambarsar' father said.

'Let us go to Ambarsar then,' I insisted, catching his legs. 'I want to be like that man with the red blob on his nose, who put us in the big boot near the circus.'

'When I get leave, son. Sahabs need me here daily. Badshah George and Mallika Mary are coming for a Durbar in Delhi. And the Sahabs feel there is danger for them.'

‘Then ask Clayton to take me to Khansamah Fakhru.’

‘We must not turn beggars! We are not sweepers! You boys must keep my Izzat! Besides, the Sahabs don’t want people to go near their bungalows. Their homes are exalted. They don’t want the flowers in their gardens plucked.’

‘Son,’ mother said from where she sat feeding little baby, whom father and mother had named Hem after Pandit Bhakti Ram had read his palm. ‘We are not to eat their crumbs! They are really untouchables because they eat beef. And drink liquor.’

‘Ba-ji’, put in Des, ‘he was begging Clayton for peppermints.’

‘Nahin,’ I shouted. ‘You asked him first.’ And, sulking, I rolled on the verandah ground.

‘Don’t dirty your clothes,’ mother said, ‘I only washed them yesterday.’

‘Ohe!’ threatened father and lifted his hand. ‘Did you say you want to be a Sahab!’

I whined.

Suddenly father lifted me, sat me up and slapped me.

I shrieked and sobbed.

Just then Clayton came and said:

‘Babuji-Owen Sahib is waiting for you to go to hockey match. He is in the gig outside.’

At the mention of the gig, I got up and ran towards the door.

Des followed me and dragged me back when I was near the door.

I turned and hit him, shouting:

‘Ja-Pale face! Ugly!’

Owen Sahab sent his syce to stop us quarrelling.

Father came, saluted Owen Sahab and went towards the gig.

The Sahab said something.

Clayton, who had followed father, lifted us both and took us towards the Sahab.

‘Kya nam?’ Owen Sahab asked.

‘This is Des ‘Raj,’ father said. And that is Mulk Raj...’

‘Third?’

‘Clayton go and fetch the little one-Hem Raj’ father said.

Mother was at the door holding the little one.

Clayton fetched Hem.

The Sahab gave three rupees to Clayton, saying 'one for each! To Burra boy Brute, Chotta boy Bully! Sabse Chotta boy Bitti.'

And he smiled.

Clayton salammied the Sahab as he stood by.

'Take me on the gig!' I cried.

'Alright, Lal Chand!' 'Take Bully!' and he beckoned Brute also.'

And we were put in front of father's legs and taken to see the hockey match, in which Owen Sahab was Kaptan and father referee.

Soon after this incident, I noted that the luggage in the house, the boxes, carpets and chairs, were being packed up.

'Are we going to Ambarsar?' I asked mother.

'No son,' she said. 'The Paltan is going to Nowshera, near Peshawar. Where you were born.'

I wonder what it meant: 'You were born.'

'Where did I come from, Ma?' I asked anxious to know my origin.

‘Sain Lok put you in an alcove in our house in Peshawar.’

‘Will you show me?’

‘Acha, we will go to Peshawar for a day, while the house in Nowshera is being arranged.’

I went out to the Grand Trunk Road. I had been told this road went to Peshawar.

I looked as far as I could towards Peshawar.

I wished we were going on camels, which went tied nose to tail, tail to nose. I would then see everything on the way up to far far away on the road.

I knew my wish would be ignored. Still I stood there, the thumb of my left hand in my mouth, wondering about what was beyond Mian Mir, and how far was Peshawar from where I was, and how much further was Vilayat where the Sahabs came from.

SECTION 2

Peshawar

As our luggage would take three days to be put in the new house in Nowshera cantonment, father took us to the house of a friend of his, Di. Khan Sahab in Peshawar.

I had been fast asleep when we got there at night.

The next morning I woke up in the verandah of a big bungalow. The house was surrounded by a high wall, beyond the garden. The wall had holes on it at the top. I wondered why!

I was given hot milk in a cup with a biscuit by a nurse in a white Angrezy frock.

Des lay on the same bed by me and was awakened in the same way as me. I wished he had been sent to stay with Chacha Piaru in Ambarsar, as I would get all the attention as guest in this household.

Father sat in an armchair, talking to a fair-skinned big man, with a full moustachio like his own.

I went up to father, and gauchely neared the big fair man.

Sav Salaam-ei-leikam to Dr. Khan'.

'Salaam-e.-leikam!' I repeated like a parrot.

'Wa leikam Salaam!' Our host said. And he drew me to himself.

'Sister Mariam,' he said to the Nurse, 'fetch some pista from Begum Sahab for the children.'

'Biscoots' I said.

'Acha, son, not one but two biscoots. Give to his brother also.'

Sister Mariam beamed at me from her dark face and took me, with Des, to the Zenana at the back of the bungalow, where mother was seated talking to an Angrez Mem.

'I-Pathan Mem,' the pale-white Mem said in Hindustani. 'You born Pathan?... Come...to adopted Pathan...'

I snuggled up to her.

And she patted me. Then she beckoned Des to come to her.

'Nam?'

'Brute?' I said pointing to Des. 'Bully!' I pointed to myself. 'Bitti', I pointed to the baby still asleep on a cot near mother. 'Owen Sahab gave these names to us,' And I sang the song father had made up about me:

Bully! Bully! 'Bully my son,
Bully my dog,
Bully my pig,
Bully my son, son. son...

And she patted me, saying to mother in Hindustani: 'Just the kind of little boy whom the Pathans take away and demand ransom for. They take away Mem's also. I being Dr. Khan Sahab's Mem am safe...' And she mimed gunshots: 'Thak! Thak! Thak! In the Swat hills—much danger. Pathans not like Angrez log...'

'My father also fought the Ferungis...' Mother said. I from Sikh family.'

'Sikhs very brave. Pathans frightened of Sikhs only,' the Mem Sahab said. 'But Pathan log good friends—Bad enemies.'

I was surprised to see a Mem speaking our tongue, even though in broken words.

I sensed that we were in an exalted house.

Later, mother told us: 'Dr. Khan Sahab is from a big Pathan family. He has been to Vilayat. Far far away. To become Doctor. Vilayat. From where Owen Sahab comes. This Mem is from London.'

'Our grandfather is Sikh Ma?' I asked.

‘Han—from a village, not big city. From Daska, near Sialkot city. Where Raja Rasalu came from—the Prince who conquered the whole world, with his sword, bow and arrows.’

I felt exalted in this Angrezi household. After having been given a ride in Owen Sahab’s gig, I wanted not to be Raja Rasalu, but an Angrez boy, who might be allowed to play with Karmel Longdon Sahab’s daughter: I felt uplifted from being Babu’s son to be the guest of a Doctor, who had been to London town, and whose wife was this Angrez Mem Sahab, big pink faced woman, like a Pathan woman, but dressed in a long frock, not in kurta salwar.

‘Mother—they take away Mems and Baba log of the Sahabs?’ I asked from fear of being taken away.

‘Han, son. That is why our Pathan has come here. Many Paltan are in Peshawar—Nowshera—Bannu—Kohat—Quetta. Pathans do not like Angrezi Sarkar. They sit in a Jirga circle. Mullah says: “Go and fetch Mem of Jarnel.” They come in broad daylight. Beating drums. And take away either Mem or Baba. and they demand one lakh. Never less...’

I want to be Raja Rasalu then—not Angrez Baba!’ I said.

Nurse came and said: 'Ghusal ready?'
'Come let me bathe you', mother said.

In the afternoon, father and mother took us in a tonga to the cantonment to see: 'the house where Bully was born.'

All along the way, the houses, with their thick mud walls or of red bricks, were like little forts. And almost each Pathan whom we passed had a rifle slung on his shoulders, with a belt of cartridges across his waist.

Soon we saw a Pathan with black beard, gun on his shoulder, riding a horse.

For me the guns meant that the bullet went off from it, with a whistling sound and a final shriek, as on the Chandman beyond the parade ground of 38th Dogras regiment, where rangroots practiced shooting bullets on targets.

'Who is the Raja of the Pathans?' I asked.

'Sardar of Jirga-in every village is the Afsar of Pathans,' father said.

My gaze was diverted by the caravan of camels, nose to tail, tail to nose, with a Pathan, ahead, rifle in hand. A camel stopped to nibble

at the branch of a Kikar tree. The Pathan dragged him by the rope. The camel groaned, but obeyed.

‘I want to ride the camel,’ I said.

‘When you are a big man,’ said father.

‘Thump! Thump! Thump!’ I sang the song of camel’s feet, as I stood between father’s legs.

I saw donkeys, sheep, and women in bunches, walking behind Pathans with guns.

‘I want a little donkey to ride, like the pony of Karna Longdon Sahab’s Babu!’ I asked.

‘Not so much noise, or a Pathan will come and take you away!’ father said. ‘Look at the big Fort there on the side. And the barracks!’

I looked. The Angrezi flag was hanging on top of the big gate.

The tongawallah’s stick rattled away on the wheel, on the wide road, to warn pedestrians to keep out of the way.

As we entered barrack land, I noticed the Punjabi sepoy, with long turraas of their turbans and neat Angrezi uniforms like those worn by Tommy Goras. And there were sepoy guards, every fifty yards, holding their guns as though they would soon get the order to shoot. I felt nervous with so many guns about. Further

ahead there were Gora soldiers in sola topees, Khaki shirts and shorts and brown boots, walking two together, rifles on their shoulders.

‘How far now?’ I asked mother impatiently.

‘Soon,’ she said vaguely, from under the semi cover of her dupatta overshadowing her eyes.

‘Why do you keep jhund when Mems don’t?’ I asked, as I wanted mother to be like Dr. Khan’s Mem

‘The women here have to keep purdah son,’ she said evasively. ‘Or Pathans take them away.’

I leaned on her torso, nearly falling over Bitti

‘Vay!’ she whispered. ‘Careful.’

‘Where are the Sahab’s bungalows?’ I asked. ‘As in Mian Mir?’

‘No Sahabs bring their Mems to Peshawar,’ father said. ‘Jarnel Sahab--the Pathans take the Mems away.’

At last the tonga stopped opposite some barracks, by a house, which looked like our Mian Mir house.

A sepoy with a long turra on his turban sat on a basket chair smoking the hookah in the verandah, his rifle slung across his shoulder.

He got up, clicked his heels and salamed father.

‘Subedar Gulam Muhammed Sahab lives here...’

‘I am from 38th Dogras,’ father said. ‘We lived here five years ago. We just want to see the house.’

The sepoy saluted and led the way into the courtyard. I ran ahead.

‘Ohe Shantan!’ father called, ‘Wait!’

I was irrepressible.

‘Where was I found?’ I asked.

Mother came to the verandah. Then, slowly, we went into a big room.

‘There,’ she whispered. ‘There is that alcove in which I found you. Dai Fatma picked you up from the alcove and left you there on the bed for me!’

I looked at the alcove, my thumb in my mouth. Then I looked at mother. Her face was hidden behind the ghundi. I looked towards father, who stood at the door, holding Des by his left hand.

I did not believe mother’s story. I wondered from where had Dai Fatma brought me.

‘Dai also left Hem in a alcove, mother?’

Mother nodded.

I felt that there was something mother was hiding.

She bent down and passed her hand over my head and said-

‘May you live long, son. When you were a month old, Aga Khan Pir Shah blessed you in the Jamait Khana. He came to Peshawar and I took you to him though your father being Arya Samaji did not come.’

‘Mother, where did you take me to the Aga Khan? I asked suddenly after the tongawallah swish the chabuk above the ears of the horse.

‘Somewhere near the cantonment, son I don’t remember where.’

‘He stayed as the guest of the Jarnel Sahab of the Brigade,’ father said. ‘And held a durbar under the Shamiana in the garden...’

‘Han! Han!’ mother said, ‘I came with Gurdevi, of Babu Chattar Singh’s house and Ali’s mother, and Clayton’s mother.’

‘Aga Khan was not here only to bless children,’ father said with averted face. ‘The Sarkar wanted him as a big Muhammadan to reconcile the Pathans. So that no more Mems may be kidnapped.’

‘Where is the Jarnel’s house’ I persisted.

‘On this very road!’ said father.

‘There – ahead!... But we have no time to look. Anyhow, none is allowed inside the compound of Jarnel Sahab’s house.’

I was disappointed. Because if the Aga Khan wore Angrezi clothes, and had a sola topee on his head, as in the photo of him on mother’s mandala, I could ask to be given the clothes of an Angrez Babu. I would also go to London town like Dr. Khan Sahab, and become a Daktar. I could not understand why father did not wear a sola tope.

‘To the Toshia Khani Bazar!’ father ordered the tongawallah.

As I wanted to see everything in Peshawar, I thrust myself between father’s legs again and stood by him while Des was on the right.

On the long empty road of the cantonment by the Fort where an occasional

squad of sepoy's marched in full uniform, led by a Jamadar Sahab and Havildar, our horse, with the bright plumes on his head, neighed and ran.

And soon we entered a crowded street of the city. Here were tall hefty pathans, with pointed kullahs on their heads, long tunics and salwars, dragging carts like bullocks, warning women, who looked like ghosts with their black veils lifted slightly to see where they were going. Rough boys in dirty long tunics struck donkeys into obedience on the parallel tracks on both sides of the bazar, kicking up clouds of dust: Further up the street narrowed: And now the tonga was creaking its way, with the driver rattling his cane on the wheel, and shouting: 'Bacho! Bacho! Two hefty men, in large loose tunics and salwars, carrying rifles on their shoulders: with a few Sikhs with big beards, dressed like Pathans: And occasional Lallas, like father, with round caps on their heads: heaps of melon by the roadside: There were rag shops of Kabarias: Stalls serving bowls of steaming tea to Pathans. Shops with baskets of dried fruits and almonds and pistachios and figs and walnuts: Cookshops from which the smoke of charcoal and smell of burning Kababs rose in spirals, enveloping the faces of grim customers eating

morsels of big Nan Roti, after dipping bread in broth in the big cups: Some Pathans puffed on hookahs and uttered protracted coughs and abuses on the Pathan boys who served them.

‘Melon?’ I shouted.

‘Chup!’ father silenced me.

After a while I said : ‘I want-’

‘Ohe be patient!’ father said. ‘Always : ‘I want’ I want! I want!’

‘Take us to the shop of Sardar Phool Singh goldsmith!’ father ordered the tongawallah.

Cloth shops Broom sellers: tobaccowallas: And above some shops, bejewelled women, big eyed, red checked, without veils, laughing and joking, while Pathans twisted their moustachios or made signs to them with their hands.

I was confused and sweating in this natu city.

‘Come son, quick,’ mother said as I tarried.

Ahead of us, father was embracing, I guessed, Sardar Phool Singh.

‘Ao! Ao, sons,’ the Sikh merchant greeted us.

‘Joins hands to Chachaji!’ father said.

Mother drew the apron onto her face.

‘Your sister is inside,’ Sardar Phool Singh said, pointing with his hand extended from thick torso below his small neck towards the interior.

‘Mother went before us three steps and walked into the dark room behind the shop.

‘Ao sons-what will you have, milk or tea?’

Des smiled sheepishly.

‘Milk,’ I said gauchely. ‘Also biscoot.’

‘Nahin, son, you are not to open your mouth wide like that!’ father warned me, picking me up and putting me on a dais.

The talk of elders was about how many murders there were in the past year through blood feuds. And how the elder brother of Dr. Khan who was a teacher, was holding Jirga meetings to persuade the tribes not to fight each other. ‘The Angrezi Sarkar was bringing more Paltans to overawe the Pathans, who had taken away two Mems and a baby girl.

Sardar Phool Singh said:

‘A Pathan servant of Dipty Commissioner murdered his Sahab last month. That may be why your Paltan has been brought back. Also, quarter guard of a Sikh paltan of rifles was looted.’

I began to cry for no reason.

‘Ohe!’ father called ‘You are tired.’

‘Ma!’ I cried for help against father.

‘Go inside-there is your mother.’

I went in and was given Nan roti and mutton gravy.

Mother fed me as she talked to Sardarniji. I looked sideways at the ivory face of the woman of the house. I wondered why she was pale. ‘Sister,’ she said to mother. ‘I am happy you will be in Nowshera nearby. This house is jail. Perhaps I can come to you for a visit.’

‘To be sure,’ mother said.

‘Wake up now, boys we are going in Dr. Khan Sahab’s motor to Nowshera.’

As soon as I heard this, I went and sat in the front seat of the motor car with the driver. He was a tall lanky Pathan, in a one-piece Angrezi tunic-trousers, such as I had never seen before.

I asked him to teach me to drive the motor.

‘After I have finished giving the motor food and water,’ he said, ‘The motor is both hungry and thirsty.’

‘Do motors eat rotis and drink water?’ I asked.

When he came into his seat, he smiled and said:

‘To begin with you learn to blow the horn!’

This was what I wanted to do most. And my both hands held in his, I pressed the rubber ball which made the bellowing noise of a bullock wanting food from Mali Chirag Din.

As it might disturb the household, the driver said: ‘Now, I, Pir Gul, will load this machine-elephant with luggage.’

As all the luggage, bedding, trunk, baby Hem’s small gathri, and Mother’s big gathri, went into the back of the car, and it stood waiting for our family, I was struck by the wonder of this monster-machine-Tonga, with its labrynthine depths.

‘How does it move?’ I asked the driver.

‘Inside it is a Shaitan!’ Pir Gul answered with a smile. I put a key into the mouth of the Shaitan and he moves...’

He saw father, mother, Brute and Bitti in the arms of Mem Sahib’s Ayah, coming, with Dr. Khan Sahab and Mem Sahab behind. He opened the doors.

Dr. Khan and his Mem Sahab talked in Angrezi to father. They shook hands with them.

Mother took Bitti from Ayah and put Brute in the back seat.

I insisted on sitting between driver and father.

Pir Gul was, to be sure, master of the Shaitan inside the car. He turned the keys, pressed a pedal and the monster started with a chuk chuk.

‘I want to blow the horn.’ I said.

‘Nahin!’ father shouted.

Pir Gul pressed the rubber ball of the horn and said. ‘There! All the Pathan donkeys are warned – Shaitan is coming.’

I clapped my hands in glee.

The road from Peshawar to Nowshera was empty, except for occasional camels tied nose to tail, tail to nose, with their masters making funny guttural noises to keep them from lifting their strange mouths above the curves of their long necks, to prevent them from nibbling on the branches of trees and bushes. At intervals, there were herds of sheep and goat with young Pathan boys whistling to keep them together. And then

some mule carts with big guns were going towards Peshawar.

Soon I could see a vast sheet of water on the left of the road.

Another mystery opened before my eyes.

‘Ba ji—where does this water come from and where is it going?’

‘It is the river Lunda, son, coming from Swat hills—going towards Kabul.

Father pressed me to himself and put my head on his lap.

Soon I was asleep.

I woke up when the Shaitan stopped.

I found Clayton standing at the door.

Father shook hands with Pir Gul and gave him some money.

‘Pathans make good friends,’ Pir Gul told Clayton, ‘and bad enemies,’ repeating the phrase of Dr. Khan’s Men.

I was to see that phrase proved to be true during the next few years. Under my eyelids, however, danger lurked in every corner of the space around me.

SECTION 3

Barrack Life under the Shadow of Swat Hills in Nowshera Cantonment

The mud house in which I found myself in Nowshera looked like our house in Mian Mir, a twisted barn.

Mother lit an oil lamp in the corner in the middle of a wooden stool and made a shrine like the one she had in a corner of the verandah in Mian Mir. And she put a big picture, which, she said, was of Pir Shah Aga Khan, a twisted wooden figure she called Yessuh Messih, a colour picture of a white bearded man she said was her father's Guru. Nanak, a brass idol of little boy playing flute, she said was Bhagwan Krishna, and a snake image embossed on brass, and a red colour picture of a black woman with bulging tongue, holding a skull in her one hand and a sword in the other.

I did not understand why she knelt before this platform. In Mian' Mir I had heard her asking God not to take Prithvi away. And now, I wondered, was it because our house was by the vast dry river bed below the Swat hills, at the end of sepoy's barracks? Maybe she was afraid of the Pathans.

Somehow, this sense of fear, affected me. So when she closed her eyes and sat by the shrine, I

also sat there with shut eyes saying: 'Ishwar! Ishwar!'

'Good son' she said. 'Now you are nearly five,' she said, 'You must learn to pray to the Gods.'

As she gave me a sweet sugar drop after prayer, I obeyed. But more than prayers, I recited in a sing song: 'I am five!' 'I am five!' And I rode the stick horse faster. And I sang father's song of me. 'Bully' Bully my son, Bully my pig! Bully my dog! Bully my son.. '

One day I asked her, naively, when she was praying, with closed eyes, her fingers touching one bead after another on a rosary, 'Who is Aga Khan? And does grandpa, your father, look like Baba Nanak? And the snake won't bite me if it comes into the house, as you pray to the snake?'

'God is everywhere,' she said. 'And he is in all these images.'

I was full of fear of these dumb Gods.

So I rode my stick horse into the courtyard, to become Raja Rasalu, of mother's stories about the hero of Sialkot.

'You are not a child now—soon you will have to go to school!' fâther said one day as he heard me making noise in the courtyard. 'You were

born on December 12th. Soon you will be nearly five!’

For the first time I sensed that there were dates like December 12th, when I was born.

‘I am Raja Rasalu! I am Raja Rasalu! I am Raja Rasalu!’ I sang. ‘I will conquer all!’ And I struck the stick horse with the palm of my right hand to make it run faster.

I also began to play phuff-phuffing like the rail engine I had seen in Peshawar. I moved my arms forward, like the piston, and shrieked to imitate the whistle of the great big black monster which pulled trains. And I posed as Engineer Driver. Then I became Pir Gul, the motor driver of Dr. Khan and blew an imaginary horn.

When I was tired of those games, I pestered mother, putting my arms around her neck, while she was washing utensils, or sweeping the floor with the broom, or cooking in the kitchen, to claim attention.

As she thrust me away gently, she would give me a little ‘Oh Kuch’ from the big wooden box, either almonds, or pista, or neoza, or revri, or mango juice cake.

And, often, she lay down by Hem, put me on the other side, and lulled me to sleep.

On waking up I would begin to twist the little one's feet, or blow my breath on his tummy or pull his penis.

Mother would scold me. And I would sulk. Then she would appease me again with 'Oh Kuch!' Or call Des to take me away to play outside the house with the other boys.

As in Mian Mir, Chotta the flute player, Ali the son of bandsman Abdul, and Ramcharan, the son of washerwoman Gulabo, did not want me to join their games. They said, 'You are still too small and might get hurt.'

The games they played in the Sepoy's gym near our house, were swinging from the horizontal bar, or climbing the rope, or trying to balance on the parallel bars all to imitate the sepoys who learnt these things under Havildar Lachman Singh, the tiger moustached head of the Gym enclosure. And I was, indeed, too small to play all these games.

Bakha, son of Lakh, the Jemadar of sweepers, brother of Rakha with the running nose, occasionally joined the sports of the followers lane boys. I noticed that he did so after he had cleaned the latrines and swept the courtyard of our house, or had turned truant

from his dirty work, throwing the rubbish with a spade into a fireplace with chimney on top. He was bigger than all of us in size and excelled at every game.

Sometimes, when he saw me sitting on the edge of the wrestling ring, he would take me on his shoulders and run around aping the monkey God Hanuman who had taken Rama and Laxmana to Lanka, on his shoulders as mother had told us. But he would put me down as soon as some sepoy came our way. Or he would take me some distance away from our home, saying: 'Ma-ji will be angry, if she sees me touching you, as I am a sweeper.'

I recalled that I began to wait for him almost every day, when the boys played. As I was not allowed to join their games, I wanted, in spite of possible rebukes from mother, to have a ride on Hanuman's shoulders. I wanted to go to his house near the followers lane, where I had seen his father, Lakha. Jemadar of the sweepers, smoking the hookah, Sohoni, his sister, cooking, and Rakha his brother eating the leavings he had brought from the Sepoy's kitchens. But mother had forbidden our going to the huts of untouchables. Nobody went near their huts. I

wondered why this was so. But I dared not ask for fear of father shouting.

Sometimes in the afternoons, aunt Gurdevi of the house of father's co-babu Sardar Chhattar Singh came from the quarters near our house which was like ours but smaller.

Babu Chhattar Singh escorted her. He would pick me up and kiss me on the forehead. But as I pulled his big beard he would put me down.

Chachi Gurdevi would sit with mother making stitches in coloured silk thread on an ochre cloth she called *Phulkari*, while mother plied the spinning wheel.

I insisted on learning to do the stitches, which aunt Gurdevi did with quick fingers. She would not let me saying "It is difficult work, sewing with silk thread." I would then insist on playing with the handle of the spinning wheel, which mother was revolving. She allowed me for a moment, but refused to let me interrupt her work for much longer.

They fobbed me off with remainders of silk thread, or cotton, to make a ball with and play on my own, throwing it in the air and catching it.

I was a bigger nuisance when Rukmani, the wife of Dr. Balmukund of the Military Hospital, came, to be one of the sisters of the spinning wheel. Luckily for Gurdevi and my mother, aunt Rukmani brought her daughter, Maya, a little older than me, with her, because they could spin and sew and darn uninterrupted as the little girl and I played together.

In order to distract us from their work-play, Chachi Rukmani taught us both how to play hide and seek.

I had to put on a handkerchief, by way of a bandage, on my eyes, while Maya would hide. And then she would shout: 'Look for me.' And I would take off the bandage and go in the direction from which her voice had come. Usually she would giggle aloud and I would find her. And then she would put the bandage on her eyes and I would go and hide and call out. 'Find me...'

This was the first game in which I was allowed to participate.

I began to long for Maya to come with her mother, because, when mother or the aunties were not looking, I would look at the parting between her legs to see if she had a penis like mine.

I think my mother guessed how excited I became every time Maya came.

And, one day, she saw me sitting in her lap, while she was playing with my looli. She did not say anything, but called Chachi Rukmani and Maya less and less.

When I asked her one day to call Maya to play hide and seek with me, she said: 'Son, you are a boy. And she is a girl. No one will marry her if she is known to have played with your looli.'

'I will marry her, mother,' I said.

'But son, they are of a different caste... They are superior Bahman.'

'Why are they-different?' I asked. What is a Bahman?

'Acha-Why? Why? Why? Go and play outside,' she said.

I wondered if the Bahmans were superior because they were fairer. Dr. Bal Mukund was sallow faced, while father was brown.

My big moments were when one of father's friends came, on his return from office, to sit by him in the hall of our house. There were two basket chairs, three cane stools and an arm chair of father in this deorhi. Father always lay down in this arm chair, put his legs on the rests attached to the long arms, and read the newspaper.

Sometimes a sepoy came to ask a favour and brought am-papad made of mango juice as a gift from Kangra, where the Dogra soldiers came from. And this would be a gala day, because when the am-papad was taken to mother for storing in the 'Oh Kuch' box, she would have to give portions to Brute and myself, and a little to Bitti, because 'the little one would have motions if he ate a big portion.'

Occasionally a Holdar or Lance Nayak wanted to complain against someone and brought the gift of sweet laddoos or pedas. And while father was listening to them, we took the basket to mother and quarrelled about who should get a bigger portion, because the basket had first been handled by one of the two of us, Brute or myself.

Occasionally came the lion-faced Subedar Major Garka Singh. His beard was

parted on the chin, and wrapped around his cheeks in a net, which reached up to his ears. On his head sat a fine turban, showing a red band on the forehead, above his staring eyes. Father had told us that Subedar Major Garka Singh was his Numbria, which meant they had joined the Paltan at the same time.

He had told mother, who had asked him why his Numbria had become Subedar Major, and he had remained a Holdar: 'Subedar Major Garka Singh is of the fighting Kshatriya caste, while we are Kshatriyas turned coppersmiths. Besides, Subedar Sahab is a brave man. He fought hand to hand with Pathan tribesman near Peshawar. And the Sahabs gave him the biggest medal, Victoria Cross. Also raised him from the rank of sepoy to Holdar and then Subedar and Subedar Major.'

'But you help Sarkar by writing letters!' mother said. 'Why don't they make you a Subedar?'

'Silly! The Sarkar does not trust those who read and write.'

'Shame on the Sarkar then.'

'Anyhow, Subedar Major Garka Singh has to depend on his Numbria to talk to the Sahabs,' father said. 'The Sahabs don't know Hindustani,

and the Dogras don't know Angrezi. So the Dogras have to depend on me.'

To be sure, we children found that Subedar Major Garka Singh admired father and brought gifts of baskets of fruit everytime he came to our house. And as he patted us and asked us 'to become clever like father,' we were given the basket to take inside to mother, and we got big portions, on the plea that the fruits would go bad if kept too long without being eaten. I liked Subedar Major Garka Singh Bahadur, as he also allowed me to play with his lion beard, if I did not pull the black string which bound it.

One of the visits of Subedar Garka Singh became memorable, because he came to father before going to Vilayat to ask father to accompany a platoon of sepoy, which he was taking to Delhi to attend the Durbar of Jarj Panjam and Mallika Mary. He embraced father warmly, when father agreed. 'Later, I have been asked by the Karna Sahab to Vilayat to receive the Victoria Cross from the Badshah.'

Mother came, her forehead covered with her dupatta, heard his words and said: 'Subedarji, bring me a sewing machine from Vilayat.'

Subedar Garka Singh bent down to touch her feet and said: 'To be sure bhabhi, I will bring you a sewing machine.'

'And toys for me like those Karnel Longdon Sahab gave me in Mian Mir.'

I said, 'And a Sahab's hat.'

'Acha, we will take you as a mascot of our platoon to Delhi,' the Subedar Major conceded. 'Sister, get Babuji's uniform as Holdar out of trunk-and have a silk kurta-pyjama made for Bully Baba.

'I will also give him a red velvet coat I have of Hans when he was a child,' mother said.

'Oh then he will be better dressed than all of us!' Lion face said

Euphoria of happiness prevailed over our house as father taught me to shout 'Hip! Hip! Hurrah!' 'Three cheers for the King Emperor!'

This instruction was given to equip us with the necessary English exclamations, should I really be chosen as a mascot for the platoon contingent which was chosen to go to the Delhi Durbar, when George Panjam and Mallika Mary were to come and be crowned in the Capital.

I did not know anything more about this 'auspicious' event, about which father talked to mother.'

Our mother was silent in the face of father's enthusiasm, again for reasons unknown to me.

But I gleefully shouted 'Hip! Hip! Hurrah!' to my solemn mother, and to my smiling father, because I was to go as a mascot of the Paltan to see Badshah Jarj and Mallika Mary.

SECTION 4

Delhi Darbar of Jarj Panjam and Mallika Mary

I remember waking up in a house in Delhi town and crying out: 'Baji!' As there was no answer, I began to sob.

Then I shrieked for fear of the dark of the room.

A goat-moustached man, dressed like father in Kurta-Pyjama with an Angrezi style coat came and said:

'Son—your Babuji has put you in our care. Children are not allowed in the camp of the Sarkar near the Coronation stand of Badshah Jarj...I am your Chacha Babu Haveli Ram, friend of your father. My two sons, Shambhu Nath and Shib Nath are going with other school children to a house in Daiya Ganj Bazar, from the top of which you will see the procession of the Badshah and his Maharani pass. Come your Chachi will give you milk and biscuit. Aao...'

I was somewhat consoled.

He put me on his shoulder and took me to the verandah.

I nodded.

'Shambhu and Shibu have been taught how to shout 'Hip! Hip! Hurrah!' You will all shout together when the Badshah appears.'

‘Chachaji, I know how to shout Hip! Hip Hurrah!’ I said.

‘Shabash!’... And, turning to his wife he said to her: ‘Help the boy! Mother of Shambhu!’

The mother of Shambhu, his wife, got up from the kitchen, took me to the toilet, bathed me and dressed me.

Then she helped her sons to get ready.

And Babu Haveli Ram took us to the school, where the children had lined up, all in yellow turbans, with flags in hand.

‘But I was to be mascot of the 38th Dogra Paltan?’ I said to Uncle Haveli Ram.

‘Sarkari orders, son. No child can march with the Paltan.’

I agreed to be the odd boy out in the charge of the lean school master of the Darya Ganj Primary School.

I was taken up to the top of a house from where we were to greet the procession with ‘Hip! Hip! Hurrah!’

As I was small and slow, I lost touch with the schoolmaster and Shambhu Nath and Shub Nath. And I began to weep, because all the children rushed to be in front and I was left behind.

My memory of the wonderful event of the passing of the procession of Jarj Panjam and Mallika Mary, is of me sobbing, while the schoolchildren shouted, after the schoolmasters: 'Hip! Hip! Hurrah!' 'Hip! Hip! Hurrah!' 'Hip! Hip! Hurrah!'

As the noise of 'Hip! Hip! Hurrah!' was loud, my cries were drowned.

Then a Master noticed me and pushed me in between some boys for a look at the Badshah Jarj and Mallika Mary.

I could only catch sight of the carriage and the horsemen before and after.

After the procession had passed, the children rushed downstairs.

I was nearly crushed.

But a big boy picked me up.

Then, as he saw the other boys stampeding, he put me down.

I cried again.

There was no sign of Shambnu Nath and Shib Nath.

I followed the last boys down in to the street.

There I stood weeping, calling 'Baji!' 'Baji!'

A policeman picked me up and put me on the platform of a jeweller's shop, where I was

given a doona of sweets, which had been distributed to each child, by the Badshah and Mallika.

I was so tired that I went to sleep.

In the afternoon, Babu Haveli Ram came with father and found me.

On going to Babu Haveli Ram's house, father found that the gold bangles which mother had put on my wrists were not there.

I was asked: 'Where are the bangles?'

I only cried in answer. And dozed, off exhausted.

Afterwards, I was told that the Policeman, who had picked me up and taken me to the Jeweller, had taken the bangles off and sold them to the jeweller.

On our return to Nowshera, mother took me to the temple and made a special offering of sweets after waving them around my head, in thanks-giving to the Gods that I had been given back to her alive from the very jaws of 'Yama, god of death, who was George Panjam, and Yami, goddess of death, Mallika Mary.'

Subedar Major Garka Singh made amends for my not being made a mascot, by promising to bring a gift for me from Vilayat, where he was invited during the Delhi Durbar to go to receive a medal from the Badshah Salamat.

My weeps during the Delhi Durbar seemed to me, later, to become a grievance against the King Emperor.

Such are the intensities of an innocent child's feelings of resentment against imaginary wrongs, done by parents and uncles and schoolmasters, in exalting gods, kings and queens, that an incident like this seems to the aware adult, which the child later becomes, like teaching children worship of false glory.

After the 'Hip! Hip! Hurrah!' of the Delhi Durbar, father beat his drum to all the sundry in the 38th Dogras.

'Subedar Major Garka Singh Bahadur has told Jarnel Sahab that his Numbrias must be given medals also, he told Babu Thenoo Ram, the Dogra clerk loyal to him, whom he had got appointed clerk in charge of the store in the

Sahab's mess. So myself, Holdar Surjan Singh and Misti Salamat Ullah may get medals for long service to the Sarkar... Tell this to every one. Specially Babu Chatter Singh, all beard and no face! And Pandit Parmanand, Brahmin dog! Intriguer! And Jamadar Suchet Singh, who wants to be Subedar Major.'

'You are all slaves of the Sahabs! Mothe said' 'The medals are worthless. Let them give you some land.'

'Silly woman, we are not of the cultivator caste,' father said.

'But they have taken away my father's land. And he was a cultivator!'

'Done is done!' father said. 'Now don't spoil my chances of being exalted by talking against the Sarkar.'

'Acha, but what did you get from the Badshah when you went to Delhi Durbar. My little son got lost. Someone stole his gold bangles. And no thief was caught. I am grateful to the Gods that I have got my son back safe...'

You will be happy to know that your Pir Shah Aga Khan was there. Among the Rajas, Maharajas and Nawabs, who came to bow before the Badshah and his Mallika.'

‘Eaters of their masters!’ she whispered. ‘They are all sychophants. Many sardars whom Maharaja Ranjit Singh had honoured betrayed his little son, Daleep Singh, and went over to the Ferungis.’

No jibes of mother prevented father from getting closer to his Numbrias.

Thus I sensed that these big uncles were in a group to help each other for honours from the Sarkar against others in the Paltan.

SECTION 5

Back to Barrack Life in Nowshera Cantonment

I got to know father's numbrias, as they would give me gifts or patted me on the head.

The most impressive of these figures was Holder Surjan Singh, in charge of the regimental store.

He took half an hour to go from his rooms to his quarter guard barrack, store room, five hundred yards away, where he was incharge of all the uniforms, boots, and leather belts for the Afsars and Sepoys. If a mule cart of the Sapper's paltan, happened to go to his store, with some big bundles, he would get some cushions put on the cart, be uplifted to a seat, and go and call on old friends, or go to Sardar Bazar of Nowshera cantonment to buy things. Our house was his first place of call, because he talked against Babu Chattar Singh, the quarter master clerk, who was his Afsar under a white Sahab. and he gossiped about who was saying what to the Sahabs against father, himself, and subedar Major Garka Singh.

Mother would make a special silver tumbler of milk-tea-hot water, which was the

kind of chai preferred by the hillmen. He would breathe hard after every second word that he uttered, so that he seemed to me to be snoring while awake. I would go to him after he had patted me. I would ask him what was in his fat tummy. He would say that he had a hundred hungry mice in there.

‘Then do you eat a hundred chapatties everyday?’ I would ask and he would say, ‘Yes I eat a hundred chapatties everyday. One goat every month. Several rabbits. And a hundred mice.’ I believed him and stared at him fascinated.

As he wanted to talk, without my playful presence, to father, he would give me the sweets he had brought for the family, to take inside to mother. This would keep me inside for the next half an hour, until it was time for him to go.

If I caught him before he left and asked him to show me the mice and goat and rabbits in his tummy, he would say: ‘Son, come with your father one day. And I will give you a blanket made from the wool of the sheep I have eaten.’

I would look at father and he would say, impatiently: ‘Acha, I will take you one day to see the sheep and the goats and the rabbits, which Chacha Surjan keeps in his house to eat.’

Another Numbria of father was the tailor master, Ramzan. He came to us often, because he was teaching mother cutting and sewing cloth, in preparation for the time when Subedar Major Garka Singh would bring the sewing machine from Vilayat. He had been stitching clothes for the sepoys along with his assistants for so many years that his eyelashes had all disappeared. and I was intrigued by the way he moved his eyes sideways, up and down, and, lifting his hands upto the sky, said. 'I pray to Allah Mian to give me enough light for my eyes, so that I can go on sewing clothes for the sepoys for some more years.'

He always complained to father of all the work Babu Chatter Singh and Holdar Surjan Singh and the other Afsars were giving him. And he said he would undertake to sew all the clothes for the brides of all of us boys, if mother could persuade father to listen to him and get him two or three more assistants. As he did not get much help from father, inspite of mother's words in his favour, he began to depend on Allah Mian more and more. He would break off, in the middle of sewing, to spread a piece of cloth facing

westwards and pray in mumbles, bumbles and grumbles. I found the sit-stand-kneel postures of Ramzan, while praying to Allah, so intriguing that I wanted to imitate him. Mother would drag me away from the hall, where Ramzan was kneeling, saying: 'If you imitate him like a monkey, his Allah would punish you!'

Still another Numbria of father's was Salamat Ullah, the old white bearded armourer, with a green turban adorning his head, from under which some curls protruded at the back, above a greasy tunic, below which he wore dirty baggy salwars. This old man had been given a motor cycle by a Major Sahab who had gone back to Vilayat. He had repaired it. And he would take a few chosen friends to the Sadar Bazar for rides, on the back seat. Father was his favourite companion. Mother said: 'They are upto no good, when they go together. They do not go to Nowshera Bazar. They go to Peshawar, where there are women sitting in windows.'

Father said when he came back smelling, that he had changed his mind and gone with

Salamat Ullah to see his friend Dr. Khan Sahab in Peshawar. He further hinted that there were important talks going on. He was being asked to take leave from Angrezi Sarkar and become Wazir to the Nawab Mehtar of Chitral. He said: 'The Nawab has offered me a little palace for our whole family to come and stay.'

This talk seemed to please mother and she had a smiling face for some days.

As, having passed the first primary class in Mian Mir, Des was going to Nowshera Primary School, in the second primary class, along with Ali, father praised him before all guests for being 'a good hard working boy.' So I also wanted to go to school, as then I would be able to earn praise.

One day when father came home, looking not as tight faced as usual, I said:

'Baji, you sav I am now five, send me to school....'

‘Acha we shall see. You are not quite five.’

I wanted somehow to be with other boys. If they would not let me play with them, then I might be able to play with the Pathan boys if I could go to school.

So when I again saw father laughing in the company of a subedar, after reading a letter for him I said to the Subedar Sahab:

‘Chachaji, I will teach you to read if you ask father to send me to school.’

Subedar Sahab was so amused at my words, that he told father: ‘This boy will be cleverer than you one day. Send him to school.’

‘But he is not quite five,’ father said. ‘Ofcourse, the Head Master Sahab wants to give tuition in Hindustani to Sahabs. I can recommend him as a Munshi and he will admit Bully to the first primary class.’

‘I will go with Des tomorrow. I insisted’ Ask him take me,’ I insisted.

‘No-the school is too far. I will get Clayton to take you on the bicycle, with a note to the Head Master, Sheikh Jan Muhammad...’

And so I was sent the next day, after mother had dressed me in a white kurta-salwar, put my feet in gold embroidered Peshawari shoes and put a black soot mark on my forehead, which I did not like.

‘Why mother? Why do you want to make me ugly?’ I protested.

‘Son, this is against the evil eye!’

Not reconciled, I went sulking to school with Clayton, seated on the handle of his bicycle.

Clayton presented me to the Head Master with father’s note. Sheikh Jan Muhammad nodded and called a peon to call Master Din Gul.

Master Din Gul came and said:

‘Salaam-ci-leikam!’

‘This little boy is to be on probation till he is five in three months time. Make him sit by you. And let him see how children learn.’

Master Din Gul salaamed and took my hand.

Clayton said: ‘I will come and fetch you at four.’

I entered the first primary class.

Pathan boys, with greasy kullahs and dirty clothes, sat in rows, small ones in front, big ones behind.

Master Din Gul put me next to his desk on a mat.

I saw six boys on the side, sweating as they balanced themselves on their feet, bottoms up, and arms passed through their legs, holding their ears.

Master Din Gul struck the mat on which he was sitting on a dais with a cane to quieten the class.

Then he got up cane in hand, went near the boys who were holding ears and struck all of them one blow each, shouting: 'Bottoms up!'

Two of the boys began to sob.

I had tears in my eyes:

Master Din Gul came back and said to me:

'You little Babu's son-learn to be a Pathan! Take this cane! Go and stand by those boys! When one of them lowers his bottom, strike him a blow! Understand?'

I got up under the pressure of his voice and went towards the boys.

I stood transfixed, the forefinger of doubt of my left hand in my mouth.

‘Come here Rape-sister!’

I returned.

‘Here!’ he shouted and gave me the cane.
‘Go and give one each to those boys!’

I went.

But I could not lift the cane.

Master Din Gul jumped up and came to me, took my hand with the cane and made me strike once, twice, thrice.

The stroke was feeble.

He shouted:

‘Lentil eating Babu’s son! You will never be a Pathan!’

I began to cry and fell in a heap rolling on the ground.

He lifted me, saying:

‘I will take you back to Head Master Sahab. You are too small to join the school.’

‘Why are you crying?’ the Head Master asked me when I was presented to him.

I lifted my right hand and pointed towards the first primary class. Then I rubbed my eyes.

‘What has happened?’

‘He is frightened of my punishing the boys,’ said Master Din Gul.

‘You must not make them ‘hold ears’ Master Din Gul,’ the Head Master said. ‘Parents are complaining.’

At this I began to sob.

The Head Master called a tonga to take me home. He wanted to please my father for some reason. So he carried me in his lap all the way.

When I faced father, I said: ‘I don’t want to go to school again...’ And I began to sob. ‘One day I will also be asked to ‘hold ears’ by Master Din Gul,’ I said! ‘So I don’t want to go to school.’

‘You were crying to go to school for months—now you are crying not to go!’

And he turned to Sheikh Jan Muhammad: ‘Acha, Head Master Sahab, advise the masters not to ask boys to ‘hold ears’... And I have already got Owen Sahab, our Ajitan-Sahab, to learn Hindustani from you. Then he called to mother: ‘Mulky’s mother, prepare tea for Head Master Sahab. And give Mulky some sweets...Ofcourse, you have spoilt him utterly...’

After the boys in the Paltan heard that I had got the 'hold ears' punishment stopped at school, they let me stand and watch them playing games.

As Bakha, the biggest boy, who was best at all games, let me hold the thread of the kite he was flying, the other boys also relented and let me be near them, if I could bribe them with some of my "Oh Kuch" channa, or monkey nuts, or sweets.

Brute was asked by mother 'not to ill treat' me. And he grudgingly talked to me, now and then, complaining that mother cooked the meal so slowly every morning that she made us late for school, and would I do a weep to make her understand that Masters beat us for being late.

I gave Ismet Ullah a pencil I stole from father's tin trav. And we joined the two little fingers of our right hands and vowed to become brothers.

Ali asked to let him rub himself on my behind in a dark corner of the gymnasium and I

let him do this. So he even asked me home and told his mother to give me a mutton bone to suck.

And one day when Clayton did not turn up to fetch me back from school, he allowed me to walk with him, even waiting now and then for me to run and catch up with him.

Not only that. he gave me berries, which he plucked from a bush near the railway bridge, even though he prized them, because his hands had got scratched by the thorns while plucking the fruit.

If the move from Mian Mir to Nowshera had brought a sense of open space to me, then going to school, away from going round and round in circles in the compound of the house, inspired secret ambitions in me to memorise more tables and words than my brother Des, so that I may prove myself superior to him, though he was one class ahead of me.

Already, I had been repeating the tables which father made him recite in the evening

before we children went to sleep. And when I recited the alphabet, 'alph, bay pay' at school to Ali's father, Abdul, this impressed the bandsman so much that he taught me all the letters of the Urdu alphabet.

Without being asked to do so, I recited the alphabet to mother. She was so proud of my utterance that she asked me to repeat the 'alph, bay, pay' to father, at hot-milk-drinking time at night.

And father was so struck with my memory that he asked me to recite the letters, in sequence, to any and every guest who came to see him in the hall.

My vanity knew no bounds and I would want to interrupt even the serious talks of father with his guests, by repeating what I had learnt that day at school, hoping he would invite me to show off his son's cleverness.

Soon, with the lessons taken from Abdul during the afternoons, when I was not allowed by the boys to participate in their games, I had come nearly even to Des. On seeing I was an irrepressible reciter of words and figures, and would not shut up even at bed time, or when he came back from office, father looked at me hard

But when, later, I suddenly repeated a whole page from the Gita which father was teaching mother to read in Hindi, he was so amused at my parrot imitation of those words in mother's halting manner, that he teased her by asking me to recite the previous evening's lesson before he asked her to repeat it. As she did not quite remember, he rebuked her by asking me to recite and made her repeat the words after me.

One day he brought a paper scroll from the Regimental school with alphabet of English letters. Against each letter there was a picture, like A and Apple. And he gave both Des and me lessons of six letters each day. He wanted us to be ahead of the other boys in school, who would not learn the English alphabet till the 5th Primary class. I loved this chart. I stood before it, as it hung on the wall of the deorhi hall, and I copied the letters and pictures on my slate. I showed the slate to father and got the prize of a pat on the head and a reprimand for Des that his 'younger brother had surpassed him.' Before long I wanted to repeat the English alphabet to all comers, whether they were interested or not. As father taught us, "Good Morning" and "Good Evening" to say to the Sahabs, if we should ever meet them, I began to use these words to Mr

Jones, the Anglo-Indian Bandmaster, Clayton, the orderly, and Jimmy the bandsman. And I became the clown of the house, a notorious "chappar chapper", to the knowing elders, a marvel to the sepoys, who had heard I could 'git mit' like the Sahabs.

I was so enthused by this notoriety that I secretly thought I should try to become a Sahab. So I took for models, pictures of schoolboys from the catalogues of Whiteway Laidlaw, and Army and Navy stores of Bombay, which father brought from the Mescot. I cut out these pictures and, with Clayton's help, pasted them on the wall with glue that Clayton brought me from the office.

As there might be an occasion for me to see how the Sahabs behaved, I was allowed, with Des, to attend the hockey matches, where father was always referee, blowing the whistle when anyone made a fault. After the match when the Angrez officers were served drinks by Khansamah, we were taken to greet the Sahabs with "Good afternoon". Des and I were given a bottle of soda to share, a special privilege which no other boy enjoyed. I fancied I would soon learn enough 'git mit' to be able to talk to the Sahabs and become a schoolboy, as in the pictures of Angrezi boys in the catalogues.

The enthusiasm inspired by father's teaching us Angrezi, was always being questioned by mother. She said to us: 'I wonder when he will begin to give you Angrezi Daru to drink? I hope he does not take you to the prostitutes Bazar? I know he eats mother cow's flesh in the Afsar's Mescot. Don't be tempted, sons! All this Angrezi talk will make you servants of the Sahabs, like your father.'

I could only vaguely guess why mother resented father's indulgences, like drinking liquor, eating meat and going to bazar. Apart from cleaning the house, cooking the food, and putting the thali before him, there seemed to be no talk between her and father.

So I used father's fondness for me, to insist on including mother in every outing, whether it was going to a festival, or to the Sadar Bazar to buy vegetables, or to sit in one of the boats of the wonderful bridge of boats, which spanned the Lunda river between Nowshera and Hoti Mardan village. Father would say: 'If she comes, she will have Bitti on her shoulders and will walk slowly! We can't afford a tonga! And she bargains with every shopkeeper!' So, except when a contractor friend of father sent his tonga,

mother was not included in our outings.

As I saw her, sweeping, scrubbing utensils, cooking, washing clothes, sewing, darning, plying the Charkha and making tea for guests in the deorhi, I felt her resignation at being left out of all our goings-out to be a silent rebuke against all of us whom she served day and night.

And I loud-mouthedly asked a contractor friend of father's whose shop we visited in Nowshera Bazar: 'Chachaji, as you give us your tonga to go home on Sundays, why don't you also send it to our home to fetch mother?' Sardar Gurdev Singh had no answer to this innocent suggestion, but a nod and a 'Han! Han! Son!' And a caress on my face and forehead. 'To be sure!' he said: From next Sunday, the Tonga will come and fetch Bhabi and the whole family and take you all back! For Babu Lal Chand and his household, anything!' And he gave a gift of a basket of fruits specially for mother!

From then on, we seemed to be one happy family, going out every Sunday to sit in a boat of the bridge of the river Lunda to 'eat the air'.

And now I became the boisterous guide of mother, pointing out to her the wonders of the world, as I held her green silk skirt and walked with her through the bazar.

As she was more interested in bargaining with the vegetable stall-keepers over the price of cauliflower or sweet potatoes, she stopped every now and then, and father turned back impatiently to shout: 'Chalo! Chalo!' I will not bring you all next Sunday!' But she was incorrigible. She would linger by the stall of the cut-piece wallah, or by the Pathan who sold amulets, or look at the chart of the astrologer who was telling the future of some sepoy, wishing she could have my prospects revealed to her, and incidentally show her palm also. But by this time baby Biti, who was asleep on Clayton's shoulder, had awakened and father would say gruffly: 'Take that nuisance and give him milk and forget your superstitious ways!'

Father seemed to relax at the touch of cool breeze, as we sat in the boat, until I began to interrupt his rest by asking questions:

'Why does not the river go back from where it has come?' Will the water break the boat bridge one day?' Why is this a boat bridge and not an iron bridge?' He would answer one question and then say: 'Oh ask Clayton!'

Clayton was more patient and explained. But if I persisted in asking more than three

questions, even from Clayton, father would say: 'Now stop your eternal whys, and let Clayton play the flute for all of us.'

Clayton would bring out the flute from the big bag of baby's things he carried.

As he played an English tune, the walkers on the bridge stopped to listen, until the police sepoy came and moved them, warning: 'The bridge will break if you will stop in the middle.'

More than everything I was fascinated by Clayton's flute-playing and announced to father: 'I want to join the Paltan's band when I grow up, Baji!'

'Ja! Ja! you want to be a motor driver when you see a motor car! You want to be tonga driver when you ride a tonga! You want to be a flute player when you hear Clayton play the flute! You want to be a Sahab when you see a picture of an Angrez school boy!

This was true.

But I was not abashed.

'I want to learn to be all those persons'

'Ja! Ja budmash! You are a spoilt child!' he shouted.

As I sulked, mother put my head in her lap and patted me to sleep.

On waking up, I was again up to all the mischief and my 'why-whys!'

Clayton told us one day:

'Soon you will be going to Amritsar for Hans' marriage. And I will go on furlough to Lahore with my mother. My brother is Ticket Inspector there!'

'Hans' marriage-what is marriage?' I asked.

'Hans will have a Bahu, like Babuji has Maji...And drums will be beaten...And you will all go for four days to eat luscious foods and sweets at the bride's house. Then Hans' will sleep with Bhabhi. And there will be born a baby from her tummy.'

I looked at him. I wanted to ask him how a baby would get into Bhabhi's tummy and then come out. Mother had said she found me in an alcove. I was impatient to know the truth. Not to know how a baby was born was frustrating. I guessed the elders were not telling me the secret.

'How is a baby born?' I asked Clayton.

'I don't know, ask Ma-ji.'

I asked Ma: 'When is Han's marriage-and where? And how is a baby born?'

'Son,' she said. 'I have not been consulted

by your father. He has arranged everything. They say the girl is like Sarup Nakha, sister of Ravana, snubnosed. Only her father is a big Babu in Canal department. I don't know what jewellery the girl will bring...'

She did not answer the last part of my question. And I felt all elders lied to children.

I was now only excited about the journey to Amritsar. I had heard that that was our home town.

I remained on edge for days. I asked Des questions. But, being secretive, he did not answer.

I noted that father and mother were not saying much to each other.

Actually, mother tied a cloth around her head, saying: 'He is giving me a headache with what he is doing.'

I sensed that in the world of father and mother, there were many troubles. I remembered how mother had treated Devaki. Our family was divided. But I would hug Devaki when I would meet her.

SECTION 6

Amritsar—Ocean of Nectar

As the morning light was rising, the phuff phuff roared into Amritsar station under its huge tin shed.

On the platform, from jostling crowd appeared smiling uncle Piaru, who had come to Mian Mir when Prithvi had 'Gone to Heaven.' He took me in his arms and said: 'Your Chachi is longing to see you and will give you meat to eat everyday.'

'Say 'Peri Pai' to Chachaji and touch his feet,' father exhorted me and Des.

I was gauche and did not say: 'I fall at your feet.' I wanted to say: 'Gut Morning.'

Des Docilely said: 'Peri Pai' and touched Chacha Piaru's feet.

Past the crowded third class waiting room, threading our way through sleeping folk and luggage, skirting past crawling children, we entered the arena where tongawallahs were shouting: 'Ghanta Ghar!' 'Loon Mandi!' 'Lohgarh Darwaza!'

I liked the noise and the bustle, but was frightened of being run over. As a horse neighed loudly, I felt more frightened and began to cry.

'Station is near where the Sahabs live,' Chacha Piaru told me before I asked him. 'We

live in our Desi city.' And then, as though to avoid talking to father and mother, he went on being my guide: 'We are going across Rego Bridge!...Hall Gate there!' Later when we entered a wide street: he added: 'Hall Bazar!' Later: 'Kotwali!' 'Durbar Sahib!'

We got down from the tonga in a crowded square.

I was sweating from the heat and the sight of the congested street: Tall Sikhs, hefty Sikhs, with long beards, dressed in tunics, and tehmetts: Nihang Sikhs, staves in hand, with blue pyramidal turbans on their heads, blue tunics and shorts: Women some steps behind: Sleek Hindus in Muslin Kurtas and dhotis like Chacha Piaru: Rough Kullad Kashmiris, with grimy, sweating faces carrying big loads on their backs: Tongas: Yekkas: Bullock carts, loaded with bales of cotton: And then there was a man with a stave bearing balloons.

'Balloon!' I shouted. 'Balloon!'

Chacha Piaru fondly beckoned the balloonwallah and purchased me one, which I held in my hand.

'Look there, the Ghanta Ghar-big Angrezi watch...And there the golden dome of the Durbar Sahab. Your great grandfather

hammered it into shape! I repair the Kalsas...And now we are in bazar 'Mai Sewan.'

'The same hugger mugger!' father said.
'The same kachar machar!'

My clothes were wet with sweat. I stared at the crowd in the narrow bazar. I wished we had been left in Nowshera cantonment with Clayton's mother, away from this, what father had called 'hugger-mugger' and 'kachar-machar.'

I liked those words. I repeated them under my breath: Hugger-mugger! Kachar-machar.

Suddenly, as we entered our lane. Neighbours seated on thresholds got up and greeted father and Chacha Piaru, with: 'I fall at your feet,' and joined hands. And, further down, grimy thathiars dropped their hammers and repeated respectful greetings to father.

'I fall at your feet! Lala Achrajamal,' father greeted a fairfaced old man with a pointed white beard, who sat on the ledge by his smithy, with a hand fan in his right hand.

'He is white because he has leprosy!' whispered Chacha Piaru. 'And he is a chor. He is looting' us all, together with the Kasera utensils

sellers!' And he edged past Lala 'Acharja Mal and his sons towards a little alley. 'There', he said, 'There is our house. Your Chachi Devaki there!'

On reaching her, he put me in her arms.

She kissed me all over my face.

When Des came she patted him on the head.

But when father approached Chachi Devaki, she drew her dupatta down on her forehead. But before she lowered her eyes, she gave him a smile and then averted her face. Whereupon, he touched her chin.

Always, later on, when mother complained she had a headache, I recalled how Devaki had smiled to father and he had touched her chin. And I used to wonder whether he did the same to other women, when mother hinted that he 'was often going to the women of the bazar.'

I had seen such women, who were called Kanjris, in the prostitutes bazar, in Peshawar and Nowshera sitting in windows with painted cheeks, and loaded with jewellery. Devaki did not look like them. And I felt mother was wrong to think she was a prostitute.

Mother had wanted to go and pray in the Durbar Sahib.

Father had promised he would take us to bathe in the pool of Nectar.

I began to plead as soon as I woke up to be taken there.

'All of us-I want Chachaji and Chachiji also to come,' I insisted.

'Your Chacha must be still asleep, after drinking with Ananta,' mother said. 'And your Chachi wants to use Pears soap on her body, which is not allowed in the women's bunga in the holy tank.

'I will ask her not to use soap,' I said.

'Acha! Acha! Go and ask her!' said father.

And, after falling into her lap and twisting my face, I asked Chachi Devaki to come with us.

She agreed after a long silence, in a whisper, so as not to disturb Chacha Piaru, because he was still asleep.

And we went.

Outwardly it seemed to me one happy family. But father, mother and Chachi were all silent. We passed the Ironmonger's bazar, then past sugar candy booths, and through a lane full of toy shops, jewellery shops and cookshops.

I wondered how the fat Sikh, at the entrance of the temple, who had hundreds of shoes around him, remembered which shoes were whose. But he lifted pairs with a long thin bamboo pole, arranged them, then used the same bamboo pole to give shoes back to those pilgrims who were going away.

‘Vay, we can’t go in without washing our feet in that little holy tank there,’ mother said.

I saw that the little holy tank was full of dirty water.

But I obeyed.

I had brought the toy train which Karmel Longdon had given me. Allowing Des to wind it, I ran the machine on the marble floor arena below the throne room of the house of God.

‘You are not to be disrespectful to the Akal Takht!’ mother cautioned. ‘Or one of the Nihang Sikhs will kill you! Play with your train at home.’

I saw two tall Sikhs wearing pyramidal turbans with iron chakras on them, swords in hand, short daggers adjusted on their waists. So I walked docilely along.

‘Go,’ mother said, ‘Go. Bathe quickly. And I will take you to Harimandir to hear prayers and get kara parshad.’

I wanted to go immediately to get Kara Parsad and eat the luscious offering.

‘Let us go there first!’ I said.

‘No-we must purify ourselves first,’ mother enjoined. And she went with Devaki towards the women’s covered bunga.

Father took us to bathe by the side terrace of the big hallway.

Clever, pale faced Brahmin priests were begging pilgrims to come and have a ceremony before the bath. ‘You will go to paradise!’ I heard one say to father.

Father ignored him.

And, choosing a small clean spot, away from the green scum on the corner of the tank, he helped us to take dips, even taking us on the palms of his hands one by one, to give us our first lesson in swimming.

Then he dived into the water and did not appear for some time.

Fearstricken, I shouted: ‘Baji.’

He appeared far away and waved to us.

I wanted to imitate him by learning soon to perform this trick, even as I had wanted to blow the whistle like him when he was referee of the hockey matches. I wanted to imitate him in every thing. I suddenly felt he was my hero.

Specially, because he had smiled the day before to Chachi Devaki and she had smiled back.

After our bath, we met mother outside the women's bunga near what, we were told, was the hundred years old berry tree.

'Where is Devaki?' father asked.

'She has gone home,' mother told father.

Father's face became hard.

We circumambulated on the marble pavement of the square surrounding the golden temple. When we entered through the big hallway onto the causeway, pilgrims were distributing Kara Parshad to fellow pilgrims and beggars. I stretched my joined palms to the donors eagerly, getting a shout from father.

But I was not to be restrained. After receiving and swallowing one portion, I put my hands forward for another.

Father gave me a sharp slap. In that moment, I hated him. He was no longer my hero. I fell sobbing onto the marble floor.

Mother lifted me up. And I went, sulkily, with her into the prayer room.

Father took Des and went back towards home.

Inside me, I had reverted back to being my mother's son, though I recalled the smile of

Chachi Devaki to father and tried to picture my mother suddenly going to heaven, when Devaki might become my mother.

Above my eyes, before them, and behind them, there was the happiness of girls playing the dholki drum and singing in preparation for Hans' marriage. The tailors worked gold threads on silk. Des and I were measured for tussore silk Kurta Pyjamas to go with our Peshawari red velvet waistcoats, braided with gold. The itinerant Mirasi singers and Bhand actors came to our lane to recite songs and make jokes. And the perfume of rose water was sprinkled from silver sprays onto every guest who came.

With Hans' arrival, on special leave from Medical school in Lahore, all meals became gala meals.

Under the pupils of my eyes, however, I sensed that the family was torn.

Mother, with her frank, open village mouth, complained to father:

'Why can't Piaru and Devaki bring out the jewellery which your demon-mother left to them-if Piaru says he loves Hans?'

I would not have understood anything if she had not shouted this and gone away, then come back and added:

‘Devaki would like everything for herself! She wants to take all the men away from their wives. And my children as well. Her own child has been cursed-she is ill.’

As I had seen chachi Devaki half-naked when she washed the floor of her kitchen, I had noticed her lovely fair body and wanted to hug her myself. I realised that what mother was saying was through envy of her sister-in-law, who was fairer than her.

And I decided that, from now on, I would incline towards Devaki and not towards mother for kisses and pats and soft words. Specially because mother spoke malicious words about my Chachi, while Devaki remained silent. I felt feverous feelings to be near her, as though by merely being close to her, I would be making amends for mother’s harsh words about her.

Before the marriage party could leave, there were rumours of many young people from the coppersmith’s brotherhood wanting to go with the bridegroom, more people than there was room for in the railway compartment

booked by father for the journey to and back from Gujranwala.

Mother said:

‘They are all hungry and greedy for good food!’

Father said:

‘The boys are anxious to go. But some of the elders are neither saying yes nor no...I didn’t tell you that the Aga Khan has made a Firman-be on one side-either remain Hindus or become Mussalmans. And though everyone knows I am head of the Arya Samaj in Nowshera, they say that Babu Bhagat Ram, the father-in-law-to-be-of-Hans, has not decided to leave the Aga Khan and become a Hindu yet.

I could not understand the mystery of how the God, Aga Khan, whose picture stood among mother’s images on the prayer stool, had issued a firman asking people to leave him.

‘What is Firman maa?’ I asked.

She could not answer. But father said:

‘Son, your great grand uncle, and many other coppersmiths, had heard the grandfather of the Aga Khan speak in Golbagh, Amritsar. The Aga Khan had said: he was a great, great, great...grandson of Prophet Muhammad, incarnation of the Allah Mian of Mussalmans and also of the Hindu God Krishan. And he said

Hindus and Mussalmans are one. So Hindus and Mussalmans should not quarrel. Both should join the Ismaili Hindu faith. Our elders then adopted the Aga Khan as their guru. A Jamait Khana was established and your great grandfather became the first Mukhi. After his death, your grand uncle, Lalla Amir Chand, has been Mukhi. As you know, he is ninety five years old.'

Mother put in: 'And he has stolen twenty houses left by people to the Aga Khan! Also the land near the well-of-hopes fulfilled, where your father and uncle Piaru were born, under the care of Sain Lok!'

I looked from father to mother for some more words. I could not understand who was the Hindu Bhagwan and who was Allah Mian of the Mussalmans. Was Bhagwan shaven faced and Allah Mian had a beard?

Father's face became stern. And he looked like an angry God, or demon.

I knew mother prayed 'Hai Rabba!' when she was troubled. Or when she had headache. And I too repeated the phrase when Master Din Gul had beaten me for not being able to beat the boys in my capacity as monitor. We all remembered God when we were in the dark.

‘I told you-don’t make this match!’ mother said to father. ‘My family in Daska were asked by Babu Bhagat Ram, if we would accept this girl Draupadi for one of my brothers. And they refused...Then Babu Bhagat Ram heard that there is more jewellery in our house.’

‘Don’t do buk buk!’ father shouted. ‘I will go and try to reconcile some of the elders to come.’

Just then, uncle Piaru came in and said:

‘Bharaji why not go and ask our granduncle to leave the Aga Khan and then everyone will come with the marriage party.

‘Acha I will try,’ father said.

As he said this, came a low voice. ‘There the demoness-Dadi Koko Kill!’

‘Hai vay-eaters of your masters! Betrayers of your family!’ grandmother was shouting. ‘Dirty Arya Samajis! So you have left your granduncle and want to eat the food of charity in Darbar Sahab. Aslo drink urine with your contractor friends in the Arya Samaj! And eat beef with the Sahabs!’ The dupatta on her head revealed the gold mound of her chok, which village women wore.

‘Dadi,’ father said with joined hands. ‘It is difficult enough to reconcile the Baradari. Don’t

talk such talk and spoil the preparations for your grandnephew's marriage '

But she did not listen.

She shouted:

'Your granduncle knows you have no religion. Taking bribes is your religion. Charging the poor sweepers interest on their mortgages is your faith! And stealing double roti from the Afsar's Mesoot is your profession! You are a thief.'

At that moment mother shouted: 'Every one knows how you took the houses willed to the Aga Khan. Ja Ja - Ko-Killai - if he is a thief, then grandfather is a dakoo! Greedy woman from Jandiala! Don't people know you take big rents from the poorest poor even in this lane!...And what about our land which you and Baba snatched away, when they and Piaru were young?'

Whereupon Koko Killi dragged mother by the bun of her hair and hit her.

Mother demolished the pointed chowk crown on Koko Killi head and shook her.

Father and uncle Piaru came forward and separated them.

'Mother of Hans!' father shouted at mother.

I was terrorstricken and began to weep.

Des stood with his finger in his mouth.

Hans pressed Koko-killi's hand and, assembling her, took her out of the little lane.

'I came to collect rents and this witch has dared to touch me! My sons will teach her a lesson!'

As no one noticed my weeping, I stole away from the shouting and fighting to Chachi Devaki and collapsed in her lap. I wondered why Pir Shah Aga Khan's name always caused arguments. Who was he? Man or God? These questions were not to be answered till I grew up into a youth. But the orders he issued from Vilayat, where he was said to be living, caused constant quarrels before our innocent faces.

When the elders of the brotherhood heard that father had insulted grandma Koko killi, whose husband had neither given up the Aga Khan nor become an Arya Samaji, they said they would join the marriage party. So Chacha Piaru came and told father.

'Fools!' father said. 'Slaves! Fanatics! Ignoramuses! Nothing can wake them up! They are in dark hell. They will never see the light, which our ancestor Aryans brought humming the Gayatri Hymn to the Sun! They will worship ghosts, demons, fakirs!'

‘But you and Piaru owe your existence to Sain Lok!’ mother said.

‘Silly woman! You hear old wives tales and believe them!’ father shouted.

‘They did take our land and the well of hopes fulfilled on the road going to Jandiala-Grandpa and his sons!’ she answered.

‘We can’t eat the land!’

There was noise of a scuffle at the head of our alley.

And soon Chacha Piaru was seen coming, dragging a young man dressed in Angrezi suit.

‘Piaru leave him!’ father said.

‘I will take you on-all of you!’ the big boy shouted. ‘Come you illegally begotten! Swine! You dare assault my mother.’

‘Ohe Machinder, you are younger than all of us! Don’t use such language to elders!’ father exhorted.

Machinder came to assault father.

I began to howl.

Piaru caught Machinder by his necktie and dragged him away out of the alley.

‘We will bring the police!’ the boy shouted. ‘And you Fauji will have to go to jail for beating my mother.’

‘Piaru leave him-let him go and fetch the police!’

‘If my father can fight the Aga Khan for years, I will fight you who preen yourself on being a Fauji!’

But Ananta, and Haria son of Lalla Acharji Mal, had joined Chacha Piaru and dragged him away.

‘We have put him in the shop of his brother, Lalla Kotu Mal, who has left the Aga Khan and joined the Hindu Sanatan Dharam faith,’ Chacha Piaru came and said. ‘Koko Killi is a greedy peasant woman mad!’

Shaken by the quarrel, I hugged Devaki.

A crow cawed.

‘Good omen!’ mother said.

I was poised between the vast shining world of Nowshera cantonment and the strange world of religions of old Amritsar. I did not yet understand the reasons for the quarrels about the Aga Khan and all the differences between Hindus and Mussalmans. Nor did I know who was more greedy-our granduncle and Dadi Koko Killi or father and mother. Only Chachi Devaki seemed innocent of all the guiles. And I felt she should have been my mother.’

SECTION 7

**Sound and Fury of the Band Playing
Tipperary in Gujranwala.**

‘Will I be able to ride a little donkey there?’
I asked.

‘Han! And drive the bullocks round and round on our well. We shall send a horse to fetch you from Gujranwala station...No train goes to our village.’

The bribe of mangoes he had offered made me so excited that I asked: ‘Can we go tomorrow?’

‘But the marriage party is going back to Amritsar tonight,’ he said.

I recalled, as we left the filth, and noise, congested town of Gujranwala and the muddle of Hans’ marriage, the quiet which had prevailed in the salvation army church of Karnaal Hutchinson when he celebrated the marriage of the younger brother of Jimmy the bandsman, Albert, to a Christian nurse from Peshawar, in Angrezi style ceremony with a few words and flowers.

The only thing that relieved my gloom and aloneness, was the loud sound of the band playing Tipperary again.

And then my maternal uncle, Mama Dayal Singh, came from the side of mother's family from Daska village. He was a tall, handsome man, with a beautiful round black beard and brave moustachio, his head tied in a neat round turban, his kurta pyjama of simple thick homespun, was a pure white. He kept mumbling prayers, even as he took me on his shoulders to see the bazars of Gujranwala.

There were narrow bazars, and a big grain market, where there was cattle being brought and sold, and narrow lanes with drains. Smells hung in festoons of blinding smoke, everywhere. I soon got flustered and began to whine: 'Take me back! Take me back! Mamaji! Take me back!' I wanted to get back to the neat world of the barracks of Nowshera in the vast open space.

He bought me Angrezi peppermints to appease my sulks.

'You must come to our village Daska to eat mongoes in the summer. And there is fresh air there, even if the village is crumbling. Tell your mother she has not been there for some time now.'

So I missed the actual marriage ceremony.

Des said: 'It was wonderful to hear prayers from priests as they poured real ghee onto the fire...But Hans fainted during the ceremony. Our sister-in-law is fair, though fat!' he added.

On the next day, I got up in time to see the display of dowry.

I heard some people whispering. 'How rich is Babu Lal Chand-but how frightened of spending money!'

And a cousin of Babu Bhagat Ram said to Ananta:

'We expected atleast fifty tolas of gold jewellery. Half of what has come seems to be gold-plated nickle. You thathiars of Amritsar are good at gold plating. Didn't you make the copper dome of Darbar Sahab in Amritsar look golden?'

Ananta told Hans that his father-in-law had taken revenge for his daughter not receiving enough dowry by making all the marriage party mad with hemp put in the Pakora dumplings that afternoon.

I had imagined that a marriage ceremony would be a happy occasion, if all the boys of the brotherhood wanted to come with the marriage party. But the fathers of both the bridegroom and the bride seemed angry with each other.

Babu Bhagat Ram, as our brother Hans touched the feet of his father-in-law.

We were taken to a Dharmshala 'rest house in tongas and Yekkas. The luggage was carried in three bullock carts.

I slept through the morning with the hangover of fatigue of the rail journey on Hans' charpai.

I found, later, that everyone had been treated to biscoots and milk.

But I made up for the loss of that "Chotta hazri" by eating two puris, two dumplings in curds, two ladoos and two jalebies and two pedas at the gala midday meal. And, like Des and other boys, I tied up sweets in my handkerchief and brought them back to the Dharamshala. The noise of the three bandsmen, of whom one blew his breath into a clarinet, while the two beat drums, took me back to our Paltan's band, with Mister Jones raising his baton up and down. Whether it was the sound and fury of the band playing something like the Regimental bands tune which Clayton has said was 'Tiperary', or overeating sweets, but I vomited. And a sweeper had to be fetched to clean up.

I was put to bed and slept the clock round. When I woke up, the sweeper was still sitting in the verandah, in case I should be sick again.

In the train journey to Gujranwala, father, Chacha Piaru and Chacha Ananta were busy looking after the guests. So we were put in care of our eldest brother Hans.

He was silent. His face was tied in a knot. He spoke only a few words, irritably:

‘Go to sleep!’ he said.

I wondered what he was thinking. And, brooding on the strange drama I had seen the day before, I sank into my littleness. And I slept through the shouts of the boys playing cards, to the tune of the singing train.

In my broken dreams, I saw Chachi Devaki flying with wings like an angel on the coloured screen in the Salvation Army Church in Nowshera Cantonment. The priest of the church, Karnel Hutchinson Sahab, who wore a red coat and trousers like the Tommies, but a red turban on his head instead of sola topee, was playing the drum, like Holdar Maula Bux. The ivory cross on which the image of Jesus was carved hovered over my head.

We arrived before sunbreak.

All I remembered afterwards of the reception at the station was the small pale face of

SECTION 8

Pilpali Sabah

On my return to Nowshera I realised the contrast of life in Sahab log's cantonment and Amritsar natu city more intensely.

I had not liked the thak thak of the coppersmiths, beating vessels into shape in Kucha Fakir Khana, in grimy clothes, with soot of furnaces on their faces. I had admired the hands of my uncle imprinting moonstrokes on silver utensils, and making big Python-like Narsinga bugles, which he said he made for Sadhus to blow 'on holy days in Hardwar.' But his apprentices, Daula and Gama, wore soiled clothes like all thathiars. And the inside store of the shop had bats which shrieked as they sometimes flew out overhead, if one strayed there, across hammers and iron bars, inbetween wooden stands and bellows and cinders. And I was frightened lest they may bite me.

To be sure, in the lane there was the loving presence of 'fairy God mother' Chachi Devaki, who smelt of milk and honey, every time I had gone to her to sit in her lap when I had been left alone by my busy mother.

In the Nowshera cantonment, there was the vast expanse below the low Swat hills. And

Lunda river flowed the wrong way, south to north, always frightening me but taking my gaze along its flow towards the unknown lands to which it was swirling along. The roads were clean. There were playgrounds of the Paltan. And we children could run and caper and shout and quarrel and go and pluck berries from bushes near the dry river beds. And sometimes we were taken to sit in a boat of the boat bridge on the river. Also; there were delicacies like double roti and cake, from the Mescot, which the Khansamah brought when he wanted a favour from father. Above all, there were the Sahabs, who patted us if they saw us, as they went to play hockey. And, often, a Tommy came to deliver a message from the Gora paltan, which was in barracks called Lal Kurti, a mile away from our barracks, and he gave me a ride on the bar of his cycle. The very presence of the distant, awesome but exalted pink Gora ghosts, eating double roti and not chapati, fascinated me. And, in my secret mind, I wanted to be a Sahab and not a coppersmith—exalted above the ‘natus.’

In their occasional whispers, father and mother also talked ill of the “dirty coppersmiths”. But then why had they gone and celebrated the marriage of Hans in the midst of the Thathiar brotherhood.

So I began to feel superior to the coppersmiths of Amritsar. But when Des said they were all ignorant and could not even write a letter, and reprimanded me for 'going stealthily to Chacha Piaru's shop from the greed of wanting bakshish of a paisa like a beggar,' I felt that our uncle was more generous than our father, and I decided I would go again to my uncle's smithy, never mind what father and mother and Des said. Gifts of all kinds won me over, in my growing years, because in our own house father seldom brought delicacies, except that there was the 'Oh Kuch' stored in mother's box from gifts of sepoys.

And, here in Nowshera, I felt I had the chance of becoming a Sahab, if I could somehow get hold of the sola topee, which was hanging on a peg in the verandah of the Quarter Guard, that all of us boys in the Paltan wanted.

Clayton had once mimicked the Karnel Sahib giving orders on parade to the whole regiment, by putting on his head the sola topee of Mister Jones, the Bandmaster.

And we all imitated him, in a game which Chotta invented: 'Being Karnel Sahab!'

Somehow, then, it seemed to me that I had more chance of becoming a Sahab than the other

boys. I realised my colour was light brown. I had heard that if one put on some powder on one's face, one could become fallow.

I thought, then, of ways by which I could become a pink white Sahab. I was not sure that putting on powder would make me a Sahab, because the powder would melt with sweat and leave the face a dirty brown. The more I thought about this aspiration, the more I realised that only by acquiring a hat of one kind or another, either a helmet as a gift from some Tommy, or a peak cap from the shop of a Kabaria rag shop, or the sola topee in the Quarter Guard, could I become a Sahab.

There seemed no near possibility, though, of getting a hat. Helmets were part of the uniforms of the Goras. And the Kabaria sold such things for good prices to brown Hindustani Christians, who imitated the Sahabs and wanted to remain aloof from the Natus, just because they could sit near the Goras in the church on Sunday morning. Besides the Kabarias collected the hats from the auctions of the remains of dead Goras and mother would say it was ominous to bring that thing into the house. Only, if Havildar Surjan Singh, the store keeper, father's numbria, could ask the Afsar on duty at the Quarter

Guard, to steal the hat could I get the sola topee from the peg on the wall.

One day, I went to this benign fat man. I began to play with his protruding tummy, as he sat in an arm chair. He was indulgent enough to allow me to tub-thump the round pitcher of his belly. Then he tried to amuse me by breaking a noisy wind. I was frightened and about to cry.

‘Acha, son, I was only joking,’ he said.

‘Holdarji, will you get me that Sahab’s topee, which is hanging on the peg in the Quarter Guard by your store room?’ I asked, as he seemed soft in that moment.

‘Acha show me.’

We went to the verandah.

He took the sola topee off the peg and put it on my head.

It was far too large.

He smiled and said good humouredly:

‘Go now, you are a Sahab!’

I ran proudly to the nearby playground, where Chotta, Ali, Ismet Ullah, Des and Bakha were playing football with a bundle of rags rolled up to look like a football.

They saw me with the sola topee on my head. To be sure, I had come there to show off my exalted Sahabhood.

Chotta swerved to rush after the rag ball. Then he suddenly changed his direction, came, lifted the hat off my head and put it on his head.

'It's mine!' I shouted.

Ali cleverly went behind Chotta, lifted the hat off his head and put it on his own.

Ram Charan ran towards him and tried to snatch the topee.

It fell.

Chotta kicked it away to get it back again.

Ali ran and kicked it further away. It came near Ram Charan, who stamped on it and flattened it.

Then they all began to play with the crushed topee.

I howled: 'My topee! Holdar Surjan Singh gave it to me!'

'Ja Ja! Pilpali Sahab!'

 Chotta shouted in self defence, in case I should tell father.

'Sala-he weeps all the time!' said Ram Charan, as he held the sola topee under his right foot and gestured a challenge to Chotta to take it from his.

Brute came to me and, pale through fear of

his friends, consoled me: 'Go home. They will not give you the topee. Anyhow, it is of no use to anyone now.' I lay down and rolled on the ground and howled:

'It is mine! It is mine!

'Ja Ja sala-Pilpali!' Ali shouted.

Ismet Ullah and Brute came. They helped to lift me and take me home.

'Oh Pilpali! Come and take your sola topee!' shouted Ram Charan, as I was walking away.

'Han Pilpali!' shouted Chotta 'come take it!...I will get it for you from Ram Charan!'

'Oh Pilpali!' echoed Ali.

My nickname had caught on.

I cried the more at the insult of being abused and struggled to get loose from Brute's grip.

'You are no brother of mine! I shrieked: 'Hai Ma!'.
'

I was horrified by the way they had made a football of my sola topee. And I was furious at the fun they had made of me. I knew each one of them wanted to own the hat, to look like the Sahabs, but had destroyed it because no one boy could have it.

'Son! Good, it is broken,' mother consoled me, when she heard the story from Des. 'It may

have given you boils on the head. Goras don't wash. And they go bald! Come my sweet face of milk! I will get you a nice Peshawari gold threadwork cap!'

I was not consoled. They had not only taken my topee, but called me Pilpali Sahab.

'But mother, it was far too large for his head,' Brute said, when he came home. 'And he looked funny...'

I suddenly got up and slapped him on his face.

'Took ma' he cried.

But mother favoured me. She merely said: 'Don't quarrel both of you!'

In my mind, I recoiled back. I would show them. Take my revenge. But how?

Suddenly, I had an inspiration. I would adopt the title Pilpali Sahab, even though I would be laughed at as a fool, a joker, a clown, like the one in the Tarabai circus in Mian Mir with a dumpling-like red nose.

I would go to the Kabaria shop and get Clayton to buy me a sola topee.

So I actually made Clayton take me to a rag shop off the Nowshera bazar, where the Tommies sold their discarded clothes, to see if there was a suitable topee for me. But they were

all too large. And they were hard leather helmets of the uniform of the Gora regiment.

Clayton said: 'It would be illegal to wear one of these. And the Karna Sahab will be angry with your Babuji if he sees you with one of these on.'

I was frustrated. For days I sulked. And I tried hard to think out some way by which I could get a hat.

Clayton made me a boat cap of paper with a little sunshade edge. But it did not look like a Sahab's topee. At home, and in school, I was obsessed with the idea of becoming a Sahab. Even if the nickname Pilpali Sahab should stick, I would wear a hat. Because I would be noticed by everyone as someone odd, but noticed all the same.

After a few days, Subedar-Major Garka Singh Bahadur, came back from Vilayat, 'after shaking hands,' he said, 'with Badshah Jarj and Mallika Mary.'

Munshi Ram, his orderly, who was as tall as my eldest brother, Hans, came with a message that Subedar Sahab had brought a sewing machine for mother and some gifts for the

children and could he come and deliver them.

Father invited his Numbria to tea.

Subedar Major Sahab came with Munshi, bearing the machine and a bag.

Mother had made the thick brew of milk, tea leaves and water.

Father gave Subedar Major Garka Singh his armchair, himself taking a hard chair brought from the office.

Subedar Sahab joined hands to mother saying: 'Bhabhi, I did my duty. Then he turned to father: 'The Badshah put this medal on my chest!'

'Congratulations!' father said. May you be made Laften or honorary Captain!'

'The Badshah's Aidicong took me to buy this machine, Subedar Sahab said. 'And he gave it as a gift from the Badshah and Mallika. I told him that it was for the wife of my Numbria, 'Babu Lal Chand. The Aidicong Sahab said: 'Why didn't you bring Babu Lal Chand along?'

This made father smile and say: 'Han, we are Numbrias alright'. We were the first to join the Paltan-yourself, myself and Holdar Surjan Singh.'

After Munshi brought the machine inside, Subedar Major Sahab asked his orderly to open the small suitcase. And from this came out three

shirts, three shorts and three peakcaps.

I immediately took one of the peakcaps and put it on my head. It was too large. I grabbed the next and tried it. This was a little smaller, but bigger than my head. I tried the third one. It was a little too small. But I thrust it on my head and clapped my hands with glee.

‘This small one is for Biti,’ the Subedar Sahab said with a smile.

I ran to show mother.

When I came back, father measured the shirts and shorts against my body. They were all too big.

Brute came in from where he had gone to fetch Jalebies for Subedar Sahab from the confectioner’s shop in the Regimental bazar.

Father measured the clothes against him. Also too large.

‘Acha Ramzan Tailor Master will cut them to size for each one of you,’ father said.

‘What about the boots?’ I asked.

‘We will get Saudagar the cobbler to make you pair of English style shoes,’ father said.

I ran to mother with my togs. I wanted her, immediately, to cut and sew them again to my size.

She said: ‘I don’t know cutting, son,’

‘Acha,’ I said. ‘Just make the cap bigger.

She took off the stitches at one end. And it just about fitted my head.

I saw myself in father's shaving mirror in the verandah.

I did not look quite like the Pilpali Sahab I wanted to be, but like a little English school boy, as in the pictures in the catalogues of Whiteway Laidlow and Co. Only the big stiff collar was missing.

I decided I would go to school with the cap on and be the only little boy dressed like an Angrez school boy, in the Nowshera Primary school.

I persisted in my pleas to Ramzan, the lashless tailor Master of the Paltan, to alter the clothes brought by Subedar Major Garka Singh. Everyday he promised: 'I will do it tomorrow.' But next day he had not done anything to my clothes. And again he said: 'Tomorrow...' And the same thing happened the next day and the next and the next.

At last I persuaded mother to call him home and teach her how to cut the clothes to my size. And she stitched them kutcha, and then made the stitches pucca on the machine, which

Chacha Ramzan taught her to ply.

Then there arose the problem of shoes to match.

I went to uncle Saudagar, the cobbler, every day.

But this old uncle had bought a sewing machine for shoes. He said: 'I have to pay for the machine to Bania Ramanand. So I have to work day and night on shoes for big people to defray my debt, son.'

I was cruel and wanted him to find time at night. But he said: 'Son, I have no money to buy oil for the lamp.'

After days of waiting for Saudagar to make shoes gratis, I again played on mother's sentiments. I got her to give Rs.5/- from the money she had stolen from housekeeping, to Clayton to buy me a pair of Japan rubber shoes to fit my feet.

And, then, dressed in this English schoolboy regalia, cap, shorts, shirt and shoes, I rode on the bar of Clayton's cycle to school, in triumph.

The reception I got from Master Din Gul

was more than cordial.

'Ha! Ha! Ha!' he mocked. 'Son of a donkey. You want to imitate the dirty Ferungi Sahabs! Come and hold your ears.'

This was the one punishment I dreaded most. And I had got father to write to Head Master to say, that: 'Mulk Raj should never be made to hold ears.'

As I did not go forward when Master Din Gul ordered me:

'Come, son of a swine. Do as I tell you!'

And he struck the mat with a sharp swish of his cane.

I went forward feeling like the clown in the circus.

'Hold your ears!' The voice of the master resounded.

I passed my arms through my thighs and tried to hold my ears by straining every nerve.

I could not balance and fell! My peak cap was dislodged.

Master Din Gul struck a blow on my back to correct my stance.

I fell on the side and began to sob.

Master Din Gul struck me again with his cane.

I shrieked and sobbed.

He struck again and again.

The Head Master in the next door room heard my shrieks and came into our classroom.

Master Din Gul told him:

‘I cannot have this imitation Sahab, dressed in Angrezi clothes, showing off his father’s big position among poor Pathan children, who are dressed in Kurta-Pyjama, with Kulhas on their heads!’

The Head Master remained silent at first. Then he said:

‘I have promised his father that he will not have to hold ears. You can cane him on the palms, but...Now, I will ask his brother to take him home...’

Brute came and said: ‘Ohe get up!’

As I did not stand up, Master Din Gul lifted me by the arm and put me out in the verandah.

‘Come! Come!’ Brute said, in a harsh voice to show Master Din Gul that he was on his side.

I got up, my right hand covering my weeping eyes, my left hand holding the peak cap. And I followed him.

I made a dramatic entry into the house. I started weeping at the doorstep. When I saw mother I howled and fell into her arms,

I was half awake and cunningly waited for the chance to open my eyes at the time when father should show sympathy.

He did not say anything for a while and became busy washing his face and hands.

Then, mother said: 'Isn't he terrible-that Pathan Master!'

'Silly woman!' father said. 'These boys are not the sons of a big Sahab! Sahabs are Sahabs! Our rulers! We are servants of Sahabs! We must not ape them!...He can wear these clothes when playing. But kurta pyjama is good enough to wear for school...'

'Look at the way he has been beaten with a cane on his back!' Mother protested.

And she lifted my shirt to show marks.

I began to sob on hearing mother's sympathetic words, and shrieked when father touched my back.

'Never mind!' father said. 'Masters have to punish children for their faults.'

'I have committed no fault,' I cried. 'I can recite tables of arithmetic better than anyone! I know the whole primer! I know Angrezi which no other boy does!...Then why should I be beaten?...He has a grudge, because we did not take any gifts for him on the Id day! And he hates me, because I said: 'Good morning and not

awakening Biti who was asleep on his little cot. He cried to be picked up.

I shrieked: 'Ma-look how Master Din Gul has beaten me.'

Mother took both Biti and me in her arms and began to console us with loving words.

Brute told her the whole story.

'Strange,' she said. 'But what would happen if he was a Christian boy, whom the Padre had given Angrezi clothes to wear at school?'

'But not even Christian boys wear Angrezi clothes,' Brute told her.

'You are always on the side of others against my Mulky!' she said.

I showed her the bruise left by the cane on my back, saying: 'As I could not hold ears, Master-Din Gul caned me.'

Brute went away shamefaced and spread his book out, so that when father came he would find him to be a good, hardworking son, as against me, the son whom his mother was "spoiling" 'by indulging all' his whims and fancies.'

I was so overwrought by the morning's drama that I fell asleep.

When father came, Brute self-righteously told him what had happened.

Salaam-ei-leikam! Did he not promise Head Master Sahab when I first went to school that he would not make me hold ears?’

‘Acha, I will write to the Head Master Sahab again,’ father conceded.

‘I don’t want to go to school any more,’ I said.

‘Look at your good brother, Des-he does not do chappar chappar as you do!’ father said. ‘We must know our place in life...’

And he took his cane and went off for his afternoon walk to the Sadar Bazar.

I went out with Brute the next day, dressed in my Angrezi schoolboy rig out. Lingerin on the way, I hid myself in the house of Jimmy, the bandman. I told him a lie that father wanted me to learn book binding from him. So I was allowed to sit and watch and help him with gumming the paper.

In the evening, I waited for Brute to come, so that I could tell him that he should not tell father and mother that I had not been to school, otherwise I would be his enemy forever.

So he did not utter a word.

The next day again, dressed in the Angrezi clothes from London town, I went towards the school.

But I made a pact with Ismet Ullah, the Blacksmith's son, on the way, to stay away from Brute and Ali, and go together to Mescot and ask Khansamah for double roti and I tempted him: 'We will have a picnic near the Sahab log's kitchen.' He agreed. After begging for Angrezi style baked bread, we went to a puddle near the Lunda river to catch little fishes.

Every day, I stood waiting for Brute and warned him not to tell father and mother.

On the fifth day, I met Munshi Ram coming from the latrine.

'How wonderful you look in the clothes Subedar Sahab has brought you! Come I will show you the flute he has brought me.'

I followed him, hoping I could ask him to give me the flute.

He took me into the room, sat down on a stool and took me between his legs.

'Where is the flute?' I asked. 'Show me.'

'First you hold me here.' And he showed me his erect penis.

I was frightened at the sight of his loola.

I ran.

He caught me with three quick strides.

And he pulled me between his legs, sat me down, and thrust his penis in my behind.

I shrieked.

He put his hand on my mouth, until I was nearly choked.

He then moved to and back until I felt my bottom was all wet.

I was crying, my right hand wiping tears, my left hand holding my stomach.

Suddenly, I was horrified at what Munshi had done and struggled to get free. As his hand lifted from my mouth, I shouted:

‘Subedar Sahab! Chachaji!’

Munshi relaxed his grip and I ran out.

‘Mother,’ I cried on reaching home. ‘Look what Munshi had done to me.’

She was washing utensils and came.

I dropped my shorts and showed her my wet behind.

‘Hai! Hai! son. What curse has fallen on our household that he has molested my innocent son!...Let your father come and I shall send him to Subedar Garka Singh...Hai...May he die!’ May I be a sacrifice for you!...’

And she brought some water and washed

my wet bottom, gave me some milk, and put me to sleep next to Biti.

When father came and heard the story, he shouted:

‘Where did he find you? On the way to school? And was not Deś with you?’

‘No, I was not going to school, but going to play with Ismet Ullah.’

‘If he will stray about and will not go to school, some ruffian is bound to do things to him!...Acha, I will report to Subedar Sahab and have Munshi dealt with.’

‘Why don’t you go to the Head Master and see that his Master does not beat him-so that he can attend school?’ Mother scolded him.

‘Acha! Acha!’ he said. And he followed his ritual of washing hands and face and walked away to the Sadar Bazar.

‘I saw the Head Master Sahab,’ father announced the next day.

‘I have got permission for him to go to school, in Angrezi clothes. But he can’t wear

shorts. Musalmans don't like naked legs. He can wear patloon. Just attach two pockets to his pyjama and that will become a patloon.'

'I want a real patloon,' I said.

'Chup-don't do buk buk! Your mother has spoilt you utterly!'

After this loud shout, I agreed on the compromise.

I was made to sit, like an untouchable, away from the main class, by Master Din Gul, near his dais.

And, in order to see if, having missed three lessons, I was behind the class, I was asked to read the primer.

In this test I passed, because I knew the whole primer by heart.

'Acha, ohe, bring some sweets for your Ustad,' Master Din Gul said. 'And I shall make you monitor of the class, as you are going to sit near me

Mother reluctantly agreed to give me a small bag of dry fruit, almonds and walnuts to take to Master Din Gul.

He hid it behind his cow-tail cushion.

Then he asked me to recite the poem.

'Suverey jo kal ankh meri khuli...'

(In the morning yesterday when my eyes opened...')

I acted the poem out.

'Shabash!' the master shouted.

'Boys-we must admit that he is clever. He is the son of a servant of the Sahabs whom the Ferungis favour. But the Babu Sahab may be useful to us when our Pathan brothers are punished for carrying guns. So from today the boy will be monitor of the class. Though he is little, you must obey him. And I will teach him to cane you properly for your faults!'

I was puffed up with the words which Master Din Gul had uttered.

Soon there was some noise of boys quarrelling in a corner.

Master Din Gul went and dragged two offenders towards the dais.

They struggled loose and attacked each other with their heads, like goats.

Master Din Gul caned them hard and ordered:

'Hold ears!'

They held ears.

'You! Bacha!' Take this cane and give them three strips each.'

I looked at him, fearful and nearly trembling.

‘Take this and—He gave me the cane.’

I took the cane. I went forward. My hand merely brushed the back of one boy with the cane.

‘Fool! Son of lentil eating Babu! You have no strength!’

And he came and took the cane from me and struck the back of the two victims.

Tears came to my eyes at the terror which throbbed in my heart.

After the bell struck for recess, I went out to the verandah to look for Brute and Ali, to tell them what had happened. But Ismet U'llah had already run out and narrated the story.

Just then, Jafar, the bigger of the two boys, rushed towards me, red in the face and, sweating from holding ears, shouted:

‘Ohe! Bacha! Don't you do what U'stad Din Gul says if you value your life! I will tear your belly with my goathead!’

I had already begun to weep, on seeing him come towards me. I sobbed at his words.

He gave a slap on my face and ran away towards the courtyard.

Then he caught hold of his adversary and began a goat fight with him, which had been

interrupted in the class by Master Din Gul.

The other boys crowded round the two goats. And as Jafar ran back and then forward and hit the other in the stomach, the audience clapped, shouting: 'Shabash Jafar!'

I was sobbing, till the Head Master sighted me and took me to his room.

'Has Master Din Gul beaten you again?' he asked.

'Nahin...'

'Then why are you weeping?'

'Because I have been made Monitor and have to cane boys.. They say they will kill me!'

'Acha, don't cry. I will call the whole school and tell the Masters and the boys—no beating of anyone. Except when really necessary. When you boys don't study...So you will not be beaten. Even though you are Pilpali Sahab, you are a clever little fellow..You seem to know the meaning of the poet's phrase, "Badnam hi honge to kya Nam na hoga!" (Even if I get a bad name—won't I still be famous)'

To be sure, I had now realised I was a clever little fellow. Not only clever but cunning. Maybe I was like mother. She was ignorant, but shrewd.

Father often said to her: 'You are a stupid peasant woman. But you know how to use the children against me.' And I felt I knew how to get sympathy from elders, with some trick or the other, when they ignored the non-complaining Des. I knew that I used mother against father. If I had got the Angrezi school boys clothes resewn to put on to become Pilpali Sahab, I had got her to learn from Ramzan to make them to my size. And much as I may put on the airs of a Sahab, I was with her in her 'Natuness,' hypocritically sharing her contempt for the Ferungis.

I did not care what people said about me. I had pride in me, accruing from father's praise of my memory. Everyone thought me small, contemptible, inferior, but clever. And I had accepted the nicknames given to me: 'Nutfa!' (Spark), 'Budmash bacha'! (Naughty boy) and 'Pilpali Sahab.' I tried to use my ability to pretend to make myself loveable to the sepoys with my clowning. In this way, I had the sense that I could take advantage of the sentimental affection for children that most elders exuded. I did not think all this out. I sensed it all through my instinctive cunning. So I benefited from my childishness, which was excused, because everyone dismissed me as a prodigy, who could 'git mit' in Angrezi. I also defied, through my

mother's indulgence of my childishness, the don'ts of the elders.

Some other children at school, sons of merchants, also began to wear Angrezi trousers and shirts with collars, though they were afraid of putting on peak caps. And Master Din Gul accepted Ferungi clothes.

So my Pilpali Sahabhood came to be accepted.

In order to go further than others, I now wanted mother to give me food not in the brass thali, in which chapatis and dal were served, but I asked for plates and cups, such as those used by the Sahabs for eating on table in the Mescot. Mother mentioned this to father.

'Fool! where does he think I have the money to buy those things! Don't encourage him! You have spoiled him enough!'

I got the better of him. I went to Khansamah Fakhru and, by appeal to his sentiments, I got the gift of a big plate, a small plate, a cup and a saucer, with the 38th Dogras emblem inscribed on all these. And I insisted on being served my food by mother as Khansamah served the Sahabs.

Father smiled at my antics and waved his hand indulgently. It did not really matter, so long as I was seen and not heard, so far as he was

concerned. I was only noticed when I recited a poem and showed my cleverness to guests, as this made him proud of being my father. Then for some days I was allowed to be wilful. The odd child out. Only my wants must not cost money. Specially now that I wore the clothes of an Angrez schoolboy and began to demand all the things that Angrez Babas were given by their parents.

As father would not concede a small table and chair and wash basin, such as I had seen in the catalogue of Whiteway Laidlaw and Company of Bombay, I went to Godu, carpenter of the Paltan, and brought a big box for table and a stool for chair and sat outside the kitchen to eat when father was not at home.

Sensing my ambitions, father took me to watch hockey matches. And he seated me on a chair reserved for the Angrez Afsars, as my smart Angrezi schoolboy togs qualified me, the son of the referee, in the esteem of Sahabs, to sit on the special chairs reserved for the white Sahabs. I was asked by father to recite: 'Twinkle twinkle little star,' before the Sahabs, if a chance arose. And I was given a bottle of soda water for reciting the poem. I was even presented to the Sahabs when they all drank beer. And one or the

other of them pulled my cheek or my hair affectionately.

My ambition to cultivate Sahabhood received a setback one day, when I salaamed the new Ajitan Sahab, Captain Cunningham, as he came out of the office and I was about to enter to see father.

After salaming him and saying 'Good afternoon,' I stared at him to see if he would smile. But, as I was taking my hand up to salute him, he raised his cane and swished it as though to shoo a dog away. I was frightened and began to shriek. This seemed to anger him. Suning, he called out; 'Lal Chhand!'

Father came out, his pen adjusted on his ear.

The Ajitan Sahab said something to him in English.

Father salaamed him and, then, gathering me, took me away.

'What did you do to make him angry?'

'Baji-I only salaamed him and said 'Good afternoon.' And he lifted his cane at me...'

'No talk! Maybe he thought you wanted to

beg a paise from him as do the children of sweepers and bandsmen and dhobis!’

‘He is Bola Sahab!’ said clayton.’ He did not hear your ‘Good afternoon.’ He is mad. Also shouts at me and other orderlies...’

‘Take him home on the cycle, after the Sahab is out of sight,’ father said to Clayton.

I began to sob as soon as I saw mother, to get her sympathy.

‘What happened?’ she asked.

Clayton told her.

She took me in her arms and said: ‘That comes from your aping the red faces!’

‘Mother,’ said Clayton. ‘We all live in fear of them. Not only white skinned Afsars, but all the Gora Tommies consider us low creatures. They abuse us as people ‘who relieve themselves on the ground!’

I felt that both father, though he said he was ‘Shadow Karnel’, and Clayton, the orderly, were frightened of Cunningham Sahab. As I had seen all Subedars, Jamadars, Holdars, Babus and sepoys salaaming the Sahabs alertly, I knew the Sahabs considered them all low people, who must obey orders and not look at them. All Angrez Afsars were on top. Those ‘natus,’ who spoke Angrezi, like father, were a little below.

The Subedars, Jamadars and Holdars, who passed on the Sahab's orders to the sepoys on the parade ground, were below the 'Shadow Karna', my father. The Sahabs called all the other folk 'Jungli,' one of the few 'natu' words they had picked up from the Munshis who taught them Hindustani. As the sepoys did not know the way the Sahabs lived, or learnt their customs, they were all considered junglees who were given clean uniforms, to become almost like the Gora Tommies, drilled to fight the Pathans but below the Goras. So our elders were as frightened of the Sahabs as we children were of the elders, and of the Sahabs above them. To me, from now on, they seemed more and more to be ghosts from Vilayat, remote, silent, dreadful and yet mighty, the mystery of whose greatness I could not solve. But as they were all powerful Lat Sahabs, I wanted to be one of them. I felt I could achieve the by going to Vilayat, to a school like the angrez boys went to, thus be able to wear a collar, peak cap, blazer, shorts and boots. I did not think it impossible that I should go. Perhaps some Sahab, like Karna Longdon Sahab, might take me, as he had taken his daughter's ayah to London town.

There was only one thing which I must get mother to agree on. She must get Godu to make me a little commode. So that the insult that the Goras hurled at us about "shitting on the ground" may not apply to me.

I told mother.

'Son,' said mother, 'in my father's village, we go to the fields. Squatting is better than sitting on a box. Evacuation is complete. There is no constipation.'

'But mother it would be good to get a pot for Biti,' Clayton said. He wants the bed every day.

'We can't afford it, son,' she said.

So the plan to get a small commode failed.

'Mother, ask Babuji to recommend me for the rank of Lance-Natu,' Clayton said. 'He really runs the whole machine of the paltan for the Sahabs. But he ignores the orderlies who run errands.'

'He is a coward, Clayton, son,' she said. He has dysentery every time a Sahab frowns...Some Dogra Afsars are backbiting against him to Sahabs. And Babu Chattar Singh wants his chair...'

'No, mother,' said Clayton, flattering father, 'most Subedars, Jamiadars and Holders are his instruments. And Babu Chattar Singh's

Angrezi speech is of a crude peasant, and his words get lost in his beard. Baji knows Angrezi so well that none of them will ever learn to speak like him. Too rough, these hillmen!’

I wondered. if father ran the whole machine, or was merely the Natu driver’s assistant, who obeyed the Sahab driver, standing next to him.

One evening, came Mama Dayal Singh, my maternal uncle, who had joined the marriage party of Hans in Gujranwalla. he was dressed in white homespun tunic and tight pyjamas, as before when I first saw him, with a turban neater than that of Babu Chattar Singh’s. He brought crude sugar balls with almonds in them, and Brute and I and Biti were given one each. So we loved him. And I played with his beard as I sat in his lap.

Father was out.

‘Ishriai,’ Mama Dayal Singh whispered to mother. ‘Bapu is getting old. He has arranged my marriage...But there is no money, in our house. You know our land was given away by the Sahabs to uncle Harbans Singh, as Bapu had fought in the Sikh Foj of Rani Jindan against Ferungis on behalf of the young Maharaja Daleep Singh. Our brothers have sent me to Jija.’

‘Your Jija is not an open-handed villager.’
she said his fist is closed tight.’

When father came, he merely said to Mama Dayal Singh:

‘Why did you not write a postcard to say you were coming. You village people are illiterate children. You have no sense of time or space. I have to work with the Sahabs and run the army machine.’

Mama Dayal Singh joined hands to father, but did not say anything.

After food, we children were asked to go to bed.

As I lay awake for a while, I heard father shouting.

When I woke up next morning, Mama Dayal Singh was not there.

‘Where is Mamaji?’ I asked mother.

‘He took the midnight train back because your father was angry!’

Mother tied the scarf on her head. And we knew she had a headache. We did not know the cause of the headache this time. Only she said to Rukmani, wife of Dr. Balmukund: ‘Your brother-in-law, who is head of Arya Samaj of Nowshera. did not give even a hundred and one rupees gift for my brother’s marriage. He told

Dayal Singh: "I am not a gold mine." So 'Dayalu came by the night train and went away by the night train.'

The bandage on mother's head did not affect my father, because she had tied it so often. But when she went on a fast, he said: 'Acha you can go to Daska with fifty one rupees Neondra gift for Dayal Singh's marriage. It will cost me some money for your ticket, also for children's tickets. So you might take only two of them with you, Bully and Biti.'

I was unmindful of their quarrel. I wanted to go to the village of Mama Dayal Singh. I asked mother to get my best clothes out, the second pair of Angrezi shirt and patloon, with my English peak cap and Japan shoes.

SECTION 9

First Lessons in rebellion against Ferungis in Daska Village

Off we went to the Nowshera railway station, Clayton bearing me and mother bearing Biti and a bundle of clothes.

I slept through the train journey.

Mother was for walking from Gujranwala station, saying she could not afford the yekka fare. But luckily mother's family, having received a post card from father, had sent a bullock cart with young maternal uncle of mine, Sardar Singh, to receive us.

I felt that my Angrezi clothes would get spoilt sitting on the straw in the bullock cart. So uncle Sardari put me on a donkey belonging to the vegetable farmer, Fazlu, of Daska village, who was 'going back,' he said, 'after selling onions!' Mother sat, with my little brother in the cart.

As I had envied English children riding small ponies, I eagerly accepted the ride.

We passed through green fields, full of maize harvest interspersed with sugar cane fields. Sardari got some corn cobs, had them roasted on a wayside fire, and gave one each to everyone. After eating the corn cob, I accepted the dust of the track and was happy to see the vast stretches of lush green, specially as uncle

gave me a stick sugar cane to suck I thought it un-Sahab-like to bite at the corn cob or suck a stick of sugar cane, but greed made me forget Sahabhood for the while.

The small villages we passed, with crumbling walls of mud houses. however, seemed ugly, as against the neat mudhouses and wooden barracks of the cantonment and Sahab's bungalows hidden behind large gardens.

I had hoped that Daska itself would not be a mouldering village. But, as we entered the outskirts, I saw broken houses of outcastes on the outer fringes, with the debris choking the drains and making puddles of green grey scum everywhere. Though when we got into the middle of the village, there were big brick-built havelis, one part of one of which was the house of my mother's family.

My questioning look was answered by uncle Sardari:

Ohe! Kaka! Bapu's cousin, Harbans Singh, has taken away the big house with the help of the Angrezi Sarkar...He was given title of Sardar Bahadur. He went over to the Ferungis in the battle of Chellian...But Bapu fought for young Maharaja Daleep Singh against the goras. So we lost all our land and the big house as

well. Now we do coppersmithy and cultivate an acre of land we have bought.'

As the annexe of the haveli was a small courtyard with coppersmith's workshop on one side, and three dark rooms on the other side. I felt the contrast with our own big house in Nowshera.

I dutifully joined hands and touched the feet of all the elders, beginning with grandfather Nihalu, grandmother Gujri, tall maternal uncle Sharam Singh, hefty Mama Dayal Singh, fresh faced wrestler-type uncle Lal Singh, younger than Sardar Singh, who had fetched us.

After I had joined hands to Grandpa Nihalu, and said 'Sat Sri Akal,' as mother had coached me to say, the old man patted me on the head and took Biti on his lap.

'He is a clever boy, Ishriai!' Grandpa said, pulling me to him. 'You are blessed indeed! But, don't let him be a Babu like his father, servant of the leper Ferungis. He must grow long hair, become a sikh Sardar. he must learn our Japji prayer by heart and plough the land. And put him in kurta-pyjama. He will look like our little Maharaja Daleep singh.'

Biti was wriggling. So mother took him from Grandpa, sat down and began to feed him.

From my aspirations to Sahabhood, I was surprised to hear the old man's words about the Ferungis. And though I warmed to him, I did not want to be a poor peasant, I wanted to be Pilpali Sahab.

And the title "good boy" was suitable for Des not I. I was called Nutfa spark, because I was bent on mischief every moment. In fact, I was not ashamed at being called a 'terrible child,' but secretly gloated over the title.

Still, for the first day, I accepted the appellation conferred on me by the grand old man, my maternal grandfather, Nihalu.

I had to sleep in the same bed with Mama Dayal Singh. I had to eat in a thali with him. I had to put on white kurta pyjama with my velvet Pathan-waistcoat embroidered with gold thread, which mother had the foresight to bring in the bundle, for me to go to the marriage party with. I had to go to the fields for jungle pani, evacuation and bath. I felt I had been brought down to 'natu' status, even below the bandmen in the follower's lane of the paltan, who had something of the Sahabs in their lives. And I felt odd at having to become a villager. but Mama Dayal Singh said: 'You look like a little prince, like Maharaja Daleep Singh!' And I felt vain and

accepted 'natu' dress, as long as I was in the village.

As grandpa Nihalu had noticed my reluctance to be 'natu', he pulled me to himself in the evening, before the marriage ceremony of Mama Dayal Singh was to be celebrated and said:

'Son, you look beautiful in these clothes. You look like our little Maharaja whom the Angrezi Sarkar took away by force when he was seven years old. Just about your age. I saw him with my own eyes. He had the light of Guru Gobind Singh in his eyes. That light was smudged by Lat Sahab Dalousi, who made him Eessai. You know what the Lat said to him: Giving him the Eessai holy book Babal, and taking from him the jewel Koh-Noor, the Lat said. "I give you kingdom of God: and I take from you the kingdom of the earth". And they did it-the Ferungis! They gave him the Bable book, and took our Punjab away from him, Punjab of our lion, Maharaja Ranjit Singh...'

My grandpa Nihalu's voice was choked, because of the sad story he was telling. And he coughed a long asthmatic cough.

I had seen him reciting the prayers by the well in the field after the bath. His eyes had been closed. And, with his white hair falling on his

shoulders, around his shining brown face, he seemed to me to be a near saint. He could not have told me lies about the way the Sahabs treated Daleep Singh.

‘Nanaji,’ I asked him. ‘How could his mother let him go?’

‘Chidling, they sent him to play in Shalimar Bagh near Mian Mir. And while he was gone, his mother Rani Jindan they put away in Sheikhpura Fort. When he came back and did not find his mother at home, they told him: Your mother is a bad woman. We are going to give you an agrez foster father and foster mother. so they took him to Fatehgarh Fort in grasscutter’s land, by the Ganga river. They put him in the care of a Dakdar Sahab and his Mem...Then they took him to Lenton. There Mallika Victoria made him her son. And he had to give the Koh-Noor to her as gift...Crafty folk-these Ferungis!...When Daleep Singh grew big, he came to know of the Sahab’s treachery. He wanted to come back, son, to lead the Khalsa...But look at that picture of the prince and his mother! And he pointed to two oval ivory paintings-one of Daleep Singh and another of his mother, Rani Jindan.

I had a flash in my mind. I suddenly knew why mother always said, behind father’s back,

‘Your father is a “weak man”! “Servant of the Sahabs!” “Slave!” The ancestors of the very Sahabs I admired had cheated the boy Prince Daleep Singh. I wondered what really happened to that little boy. He must have left wearing kurta pyjama and taken to Angrezi kot-patloon, with necktie and hat, like the Angrez Afsars wou on their Burra Din.

‘Then what happened to Maharaja Daleep Singh, Grandpa?’ I asked.

‘Son, his fate was decided by the Angrezi Sarkar. They made him a big Sahab. But did not give him enough money to live like a big Sahab. He tried to come back and conquer Punjab with the help of Maharaja of Roos-but what to say!’

I reconciled myself to my kurta pyjama, the village food of maize bread with chunks of butter, and black mash lentils garnished with onions, and lassi whey, and I ate lush mangoes, fetched from the little grove which the family still owned by the acre of land near the well.

I eagerly fell to the least of mutton and scented rice and puri-kachauri and Kara Parshad, with mv fingers. I was given crackers from the fireworks which the boys were exploding before the marriage party’s slow advance in the evening. I enjoyed the noise and

the bustle. And I was proud to be the best man of Mama Dayal Singh, as I sat behind him, on a fine white horse, to go to the house of Giani Ram Singh, the priest of the Gurdwara, whose daughter was to be my aunt.

On the return of the marriage party back to the small courtyard of Nana Nihalu, I found mother waiting for me, all packed up and ready to leave the same afternoon, with baby Biti whining.

‘Son, change into your khaki shirt and shorts, because your white clothes will be spoilt during the dusty journey.’

‘But mother you said we will stay here for a week.’

She covered her head with her dupatta and began to weep.

Mama Dayal Singh, who was nearby, stroked her head, saying:

‘Ishriai, don’t mind what the women say. You are our eldest sister. And we know your heart is with us, even if our brother-in-law despises all village folk and is tight-fisted. Actually, he is the most learned man in the whole

of our brotherhood. And he is not a bad man, like his granduncle Lalla Amir Chhand, who is keeping all the houses of the Aga Khan he has grabbed. And whatever he may be, outwardly, our Jija, may be slave of the Ferungis, but he is an Arya Samaji. He must be having some respect for Lalla Lajpat Rai and others who oppose the Angrezi Sarkar...'

'Dayal Singha,' mother said, 'I added a hundred and one rupees of mine to the fifty one which your Jija gave me for the neondra gift for your marriage. Still our brother Sharam Singh and his wife, and mother, are saying: "You have become a Babu's slave! Who is himself slave of the Ferungis"...' 'There is no place for me here because I am the wife of a Sarkari servant. And there is no place for me there. With him going to other women...'

'I shall soon get a room in the Gurdwara, where I am being appointed sub-Granthi. So you come and stay with me. Bring the children. At least for a whole month every year to, eat mangoes.'

Mother could not be consoled and began to sob. And Biti seemed inconsolable.

So Mama Dayal Singh asked his younger brother, Lal Singh, to see us off, seated on the bridal horse for which hire had been paid.

Before leaving mother fell at her father's feet and wept.

He blessed her and said: 'Ishriai, bless you for having this son. He will shine. There is mischief in his eyes. And those who are mischievous as children are intelligent when they grow up. He might join those boys who threw a bomb on the Burra Lat in Delhi...'

And he drew me to him, kissed me on the forehead, and gave me a gold coin.

'Ishriai-get a hook put on it and make a garland of red thread for his neck. The coin has the face of Maharaja Daleep Singh on it.'

I had tears in my eyes on hearing his words and decided to go to London town one day, to find out what really happened to Maharaja Daleep Singh. Secretly, I felt I could also put on Angrezi clothes there, and become a Sahab like Daleep Singh, like all Sahabs, and yet against them, as the prince was first with the Ferungis and became an Eessai and then turned against them.

Until my visit to the village of my maternal grandfather, Nihalu, I had wanted to be like Raja Rasalu, the conqueror; but now my hero was not a fantasy hero, but a real boy prince, who braved all the dangers and went across the black waters.

Village fervours of Daska flowed in my nerves for a long time after my return to Nowshera. I was to remember forever the miles of harvests of maize and sugarcane: the creaking of wheels: the boys playing Kabadi with raucous shouts; Buffaloes chewing the cud, as they sat in dirty ponds: Bhands and Mirasis singing to the marriage party: Stars shooting from the fireworks: Luscious food and sweets: Mama Dayal Singh reciting holy verses: My grandfather Nihalu telling me the story about Maharaja Daleep Singh.

And I sensed that my mother, who was a villager with a generous heart, had been humbled because my Amritsar-born father had not given enough money towards the marriage of Mama Dayal Singh.

So unconscious hostility towards father simmered in me, though without bursting, for fear of his voice and possible slaps on the face if I should tell him what was said about him in Daska village.

And as he had not said anything to Kaptan Cunningham Sahab about how the Ajitan Sahab had frightened me with the swish of his cane, I felt that he was, as grandpa Nihalu had said, a 'slave of the Ferungis.'

On the other hand, my grandfather, who told me the story of how he lost his lands and how the angrez Lat Sahab sent away the boy Maharaja Daleep Singh to London town made him a hero in my eyes, in the place of my father.

I prattled to Chacha Dakdar Bal Mukund, about what Grandpa had said. This friend of my father's, who was also a member of the Arya Samaj, said: 'Your father is frightened of losing his job. That is why I have asked him to make all you boys into Daktars. As a Daktar I can leave sarkari service and set up a shop anywhere! Your father can't do anything. He wants to serve long enough to earn pension.' He paused and then turned to his wife: 'Sarkar suspects every Arya Samaji to be against the Ferungis. Because some students of the Dayanand College in Lahore have been caught making a bomb. They suspect me also because I go to Arya Samaj Mandir. They say the man who threw the bomb on Viceroy Lord Hardinge was an Arya Samaji.'

SECTION 10

The Kidnapping of the Jarnel Sahab's Memsahab

Some days after, Daktar Balmukund had hinted that he was with the rebels against the Sarkar father came back, solemn faced, from the office. He did not go for a walk to Nowshera bazar, where he used to meet his Arya Samaj friends. Instead, he went to the Mescot and worked there till late in the evening, inspecting Babu Thenoo Singh's work as store keeper, and came back home only at sleeping time.

Next day when mother asked him what was the matter, he said: 'Karnel Sahab of the Brigade has passed an order that no officer or sepoy of the foj should be a member of the Arya Samaj.'

I found our household silent. And father was irritable with mother, shouting at her, and also at us for any fault we committed, almost every day.

I began to talk in my sleep, so mother told me. And I complained that Cunningham Sahab turned demon was coming to eat me up in a dream. So mother hugged me close to her and made my little brother Biti sleep on his small cot next to her bed. Being the daughter of Grandpa Nihalu she could love. Maybe in this way she

hoped we children would learn to love in return. Or perhaps like all mothers she loved her children as even a goat mother loves her little kids.

The ball of energy that I had become could not, however, be contained in the house. As I made noises in imitation of the yekkawallahs and tongawalas and bullock cart drivers, honking the imaginary animals, while riding my stick horse in the courtyard of the house, mother asked me to go and play with the boys outside. 'Nutfa!' everyone said and I felt proud of the title, though it was a term of abuse.

I was still the smallest boy in size among all the boys of the followers lane. And they were still reluctant to let me join their games. Except that Bakha had once made me goal keeper, when our boys team had a match against the boys of the follower's lane of the Gora paltan. As Bakha had been pressing onto the other side as centre forward, as well as back, I did not have anything to do but stand in the goal made of two big stones with a half broken stick in my hand. As there was no goal against our team, I shared in the glory of having won the match by three goals to nil.

After this success, I became more ambitious. I asked Bakha whether I would be

allowed to play right in. So that, being small, I could bypass big-legged boys and score a goal for our team.

He was indulgent. But Chotta and Ali, Ram Charan and Rehmat Ullah, laughed, as Chotta Said: 'Ant has got wings'.

I knew that my brother Brute had bribed his way into the favour of the boys by donating half broken hockey stick of my eldest brother Hans, to Chotta, who acted as Kaptan of the team when Bakha was not there.

I planned to do the same. So I went one afternoon to Holdar Charat Singh.

Holdar Charat Singh was a lean wiry man, who had been made Kaptan of the 38 Dogras hockey team by the Sahabs. And he kept the store of all the hockey sticks in the room next to his own in barrack No. 3.

He had just awakened from his siesta when I appeared before him. His lean dark face, with a brief moustachio, was relaxed.

'Aaoji! Aaoji! son...What has brought you in the hot afternoon to my humble abode?'

I joined hands and said: 'Jay! Jay! Chachaji...' 'Jay! Jay!' Holdar Charat Singh said. 'You will surely conquer the world, as you have learnt our war cry. And he ordered his

orderly: 'Ohe give the Chotta Babu some milk and Jalebis.' And he turned to me:

'You have not come to see the hockey match recently?'

'I have been away with mother to the wedding of my Mama Dayal Singh in Daska village.'

'That is why your cheeks are red, son. You must have eaten Sarson spinach and maize bread in the village. You must come to my village Nadaun in Kangra Valley during mango time. Now have the milk and Jalebies which Kunju has brought. I know your miser father does not give you boys enough milk.'

Sepoy orderly Kunju gave me a large tumblerful of milk with Jalebies.

'Not so much Chahcaji!'

'Acha, you take half, Kunju.'

I looked sideways at Holdar Charat Singh, in admiration at his generosity. Very few Afsars were so kind to their servants. Clayton had said that in the machine of the paltan, big screws ignored the small screws. I did not understand what he meant. But there were Sahabs and there were sepoy. The Sahabs ate meat. Apart from some leftovers from the Mescot, father did not give much to his orderly, though mother often

gave him dry fruit or sweets from the 'Ohe kuch' box to take to his mother, and she even gave some monkey nuts to Bakha. The people also put on clean clothes, while the poor fellows wore soiled clothes.

'Holdarji,' I said, 'the boys have allowed me to be goalkeeper in their team. I only have my stick horse for hockey stick. Can you give me a broken stick? I will have it cut by Godu, the carpenter, to my size.'

'Plenty of broken sticks, son! Plenty! You can have eleven hockey sticks for your whole team.'

I looked up from my tumbler to see if he was joking.

'I will get you a new one, for your size, from the sports goods shopkeeper as huckster's profit. Now I will give you a half broken one. You can ask Godu to shape it. Send Bakha for the other ten. He is Kaptan of your team, isn't he? Very good boy! Bakha! He cleans latrine specially for me every time I go. I have piles, son, and he knows I want a clean latrine.'

After drinking his milk, he went into the store and brought me a stick of which only the upper part of the handle was broken.

'Here-you take that. And I know you will be a big hockey player one day.'

I was sweating with the hot milk, the Jaiabies, and the favour of Holdar Charat Singh.

‘Oh Holdarji!’ I shouted. ‘Jay! Jay!’

‘Jay! Jay!’ - you will win all hockey matches. Only you drink enough milk and practice every day. Ask your father to spend some money on good food for you boys. He is a miser...’

I realised that others besides mother’s family knew father to be tightfisted.

Mother was anxiously waiting for me when I returned.

‘Look Ma-hocky stick! Holdar Charat Singh gave me this. Godu will cut to my size...And Holdarji is giving me ten more to make a team!’

‘Son, I was so worried! You must not stray like this in the afternoon...’

‘I went to Holdar Charat Singh, Ma. He is generous! He gave me milk and Jalebi also...’

‘So did Munshi! And you remember what he did to you! They are all like that. The crude sepoys are not to be trusted...Come show me your back...’

I did.

She smelt me and said: ‘Acha, this time you escaped being assaulted, but never you go to barracks alone.’

Father did not say anything. He merely smiled to see the store of eleven broken hockey sticks in a corner of the verandah which Bakha brought from Holdar Charat Singh in the evening.

‘I want to become Kaptan of the team,’ I said.

Father patted me on the head and said:

‘Acha, son, when you grow big...I was Kaptan of the cricket team of Church Mission school Amritsar, only in my tenth class. Your brother Hans played centre forward in the hockey team of his school and became Kaptan when he was in Matric in Lahore. I hear Des is good at cricket...’

‘Can I take your whistle Baji to be referee if the boys won’t let me play as I am small?’

He smiled indulgently and nodded.

So even if mother, being a villager, did not understand anything about hockey, cricket and football, father and Hans had, I felt, already set an example for us. I tried to imagine father in a white shirt and trousers, and peak cap, the uniform which the Sahabs wore when they played cricket. I recalled there was a photo of the

Church Mission school team hanging on the wall in the big room of our house in Kucha Fakir Khana, Amritsar, father wearing Kaptan's badge, sitting next to the Padre Head Master Sahab. The coppersmiths whose main sport was wrestling on the Akashti day, at the end of the 'natu' month, and who had crowded into our house on Hans' wedding, looked at this picture with wonder in their eyes. My young Thathiar cousins all wore dhotis but wanted to wear trousers or shorts like Sahabs. Only in my mother's village was everything 'natu' which the Sahabs despised.

I decided that I would not give up my Angrezi clothes in the cantonment, though. I would put on kurta pyjama if and when I should go to Daska again. Our 38th Dogras hockey team members wore Angrezi shirts and shorts. I must persuade father's Numbria, Holdar Surjan Singh, to donate enough shirts and shorts to the boys of the hockey team of followers lane, meant for small Bugler boys. I could then donate eleven hokey sticks and eleven uniforms and I would surely be made Kaptan. Only there were seven big boys, and me the eighth small one. Not eleven.

My fantasy about forming the team and becoming important, and bringing prestige to

father, was dissolved when, inspite of the broken sticks I gave to the boys, Chotta, second Kaptan, did not include me in the match with the team of the Military haspatal boys.

‘He has got us hockey sticks!’ Bakha pleaded on my behalf.

‘Acha, let him run and fetch the ball when it goes out of the boundary,’ Chotta said.

‘Han,’ Brute agreed But he tried to assuage my hurt pride, by saying: ‘Acha, little brother, you stay out, or you will get hurt!’

‘Don’ talk to me!’ I shouted. ‘I am kutto with you’. And I went sulking home to mother. Saying they have taken the hockey sticks but will not let me play with them: ‘All those children want to grab! grab! Good you g^a them the hockey sticks. We must share. And share alike.’

I was not sure that mother was not consoling me to prevent me from weeping. To be sure, she was generous and open handed. I pretended to feel generous like her though, at heart, I resented the boys taking the sticks but not taking me in the team.

After the rebuff from Chotta I felt that I would always be left out of all games, unless I could grow taller. So I decided to ask Holdar Lachman Singh, the Drill Master, to teach me some gymnastic tricks, which may make me grow big quickly.

I was not sure that Mother was not consoling horizontal bars. Perhaps the recruits grew taller quickly by exercises in the gym, by vaulting across the wooden horse, or by learning boxing. But I could perhaps learn to do many more somersaults than I had learnt from father to do on his big bed when he was in a playful mood.

So I sneaked across to the Gym, near enough to Holdar Lachman Singh, who had a moustachio like my fathers. I stood there every afternoon, watching the wonderful tricks which the sepoys could perform under his instruction. The way they described cricles with their elastic bodies holding the bar, or stood on their fists, upside down, or revolved on one arm, fascinate' me. And though I was frightened of getting a snub nose, as all boxers had, if I learnt boxing, I felt the best way to fight all the boys was not to

imitate the Pathan boys at school by fighting with the heads like goats, but with fisticuffs in Angrezi fat gloves.

As Holdar Lachman Singh finished the spectacular drill, and my blood had rushed to my face with the enthusiasm and joy of seeing crude sepoy somersaulting in the air, I said:

‘Hodarji-can you also teach me some tricks?’

‘Son, your father does not want you to be a sepoy. He wants you to be a Babu like himself. And I hear you already know how to gitmit gitmit in angrezi. These games are for sepoy, who have to have supple bodies to fight the enemies of the Sarkar.’

‘But I can learn somersaulting like that little bugler boy. I want to learn something my brother brute does not know. Nor the other boys...’

‘Acha, we will begin just now. On that soft earth of the Akhara, where the sepoy do the wrestling...’ And he called out: ‘Ohe Shiv Singh! Ohe Bir Singh! Boys! Stop wrestling! Do some somersaults! Five times without a stop!...Across the Akhara!’

The two recruits began to somersault as they were told.

Shiv Singh rolled three times and fell. Bir Singh fell after two somersaults.

‘Now you take off your shirt and do it,’ he said to me.

I eagerly followed his advice, And to show myself superior to the recruits, I somersaulted four times without falling.

‘Look you fools!’ Holdar Lachman Singh said. ‘Look, how clever is this little one! Junglis!’ And he turned to me and said: ‘Shabash!’

Then he came over, patted me on the back and said:

‘Every day after Drill, I will teach you some tricks, son. Only don’t come if you see a Sahab or Subedar Sahab or Jamadar Sahab about!’

And, during the next few days, I learnt to somersault seven times at a stretch. I wanted to show the boys my superior skill at some game or the other. So I also learnt to do one somersault on a lowered bar of the horizontal bar. And, just for fun, I would put on boxing gloves of a sepoy, after boxing practice was finished and do fistcuffs practice on Holdar Lachman Singh’s sweating face as he sat down.

‘Shabash!’ he would say, when I succeeded in brushing him with my gloved hand. ‘Being the son of a Babu who speaks Angrezi, son, you will

soon learn all the games which Angrez Afsars have brought. But don't forget our village games, like Kushti, Kabadi and bow and arrow fight. I have got your father to ask permission from the Ajitan Sahab permission for digging this Akhara for Kushti. I want him to get permission for us to start a 38th Dogras kabadi team. Then I shall ask for enough bows and arrows. Our God King Rama won his bride Sita by breaking a big bow, when other princes could not even lift it. We must not give up our ancient sports, even though we adopt Angrezi games and customs!'

I now felt Holdar Lachman Singh was more of a hero than my father. Because my father only blew the whistle as referee on hockey matches, while this man had not only mastered the Angrezi games of Sahabs, but also knew all the 'Natu' games and was going to teach the recruits Vilayati sports and 'Natu' sports.

My ambition, now, was to be like him. I might get the rank of Jamadar above his Holdar status, as the son of Subedar Major Garka Singh had got. I hoped father, being 'Shadow Karnel', might be able to get for his sons what he could not get for himself, by recommendation to the new Karnel Cadell Sahab, who had come after

Karnel Longdon Sahab had become a Jarnel.

In order to know more about Angrezi games, I felt I should learn more Angrezi quickly. And in order to know more about our 'Natu' games, I should learn Hindustani in Angrezi alphabet. So I decided to go to Holdar Hanumant Singh, the Head Master of the Paltan school, for this favour.

This school was housed near the Gym.

I decided to adopt the same method to approach Holdar Hanumant Singh, as I had adopted in reaching Holdar Lachman Singh.

I sneaked up to him after the school closed.

He did not talk overmuch to anyone. But he was coming to our house to teach mother Hindi to read the Gita once a week.

'Holdarji,' I babble!. 'In our school, Master Din Gul teaches us Hindustani in Urdu alphabet-alaph-bay-pay... I want to learn Hindustani from you in Angrezi A.B.C.'

'But, son, you have to go to school every day in Sadar Bazar. And I cannot have any one who is not a sepoy in the school of our Paltan.'

'However when he come on Saturday

before father returned from office, he sat in the deorhi, quietly, and waited, asking me questions about where was Peshawar, Lahore, Delhi, and taught me to repeat the Angrezi words he know. I thus learnt to say: 'How do you do!' 'Will you have Soda water?' 'Or tea?' As I learnt all this quickly, he was impressed.

'Bully is a clever boy,' he said to father. 'I would like to teach him, after school, Hindustani in Angrezi alphabet.'

'He will learn eagerly,' father conceded.

'I want to learn everything more than Brute,' I said to mother, 'I want to read all about Vilayat, and Badshah George and Mallika Mary, whom Subedar Garka Singh went to Salaam. I want to be like little Maharaja Daleep Singh who was taken to London town. And I want to learn to read the *Gita*, so that I can teach mother to read properly...'

'Acha! Acha!' father said. 'I know you want to show you are cleverer than Des.'

Mother smiled evasively and went on washing clothes.

One day Holdar Hanumant singh, came to our deorhi to see father.

After mother had served the Head Master the hot brew of tea-milk and water, she stood for

a moment, her forehead shaded by her apron, and whispered!

‘Masterji, I would like to learn Sanskrit to read Rig Ved!’

‘So you want to become a Pandatani!’ father mocked at her. ‘Who will do the cooking?’

‘No reason, Babuji, why sister-in-law should not study Vedas,’ said the Head Master. ‘After all in ancient days there was a woman sage named Gargi. And Yajanvalkas Maitreyi. I will come and give her a lesson twice a week.’

‘Gargi,’ I repeated. ‘and uncle-what is the other name you mentioned?’

He repeated: ‘Yajanvalkya’s Maitreyi.’

I felt that Sanskrit was old ‘natu’ language—difficult. I preferred angrezi.

‘Acha,’ father conceded turning to Hanumant Singh. ‘I will put your application to the Karnel Sahab. He will agree that if you are teaching men of Holdar rank, you should have the senior rank of Jamadar.’

A bargain was struck between father and the Regimental Head Master.

Mother offered a coconut and flowers to the Guru.

When he came to teach mother in Deorhi next day, I greeted him with ‘How do you do?’

Before mother's tuition began, I began to learn from this Head Master English and Hindustani vocabulary from the little book meant for all those 'natus' who were ambitious to be Laftens, Kaptans, Majors, Karnels and Jarnels.

In sympathy with mother, Clayton said to her one day:

'Ma-ji, I dare not say this. But Babuji is not one person: He is many persons: He is shadow Karnel with his pen: Servant of Sahabs when he salaams them: Pure Hindu when he goes to Arya Samaj: Beef eater and drinker of liquor in the Mescot: Part of the war machine, as he knows our paltan is a frontier force to keep the unruly pathans down: The Sahab's instrument for making all afsars and sepoy's loyal to the Sarkar: Weak in the face of those lickspittle Subedars, Jamadars and other who backbite against him, like Jamadar Suchet Singh, Babu Chattar Singh and Pandit Permanand: But harsh to those who are loyal to him: He has not got me an increment or raised me to the rank of Lance Naik after I

have been a faithful orderly for three years: I am still a sepoy...'

'My father,' mother said, 'curses his stars that he gave me in marriage to the big Babu-Slave of the Sahabs!'

I was perplexed and divided in my mind. But I had already decided to be cunning and be on both sides, with my 'natu' Nana Nihalu and mother, because the Sahabs had taken away Maharaja Daleep Singh to London town and because Kaptan Cunningham Sahab had swished his cane, and a Sahab or Babu like my father, the shadow Karmel of the Paltan, the favourite of the Sahabs. Because I had the hunch that to know Angrezi would make me superior to all the 'natus.' I realised I would have to be cunning and conceal my real thoughts while learning to outwit others.

I guessed that mother had made the lessons she learnt from the Paltan's Head Master, Hanumant Singh, her defence against father's frequent rebuke that she was bringing shame on him by her superstitious worship of Godlings on her mandala. Rather than praise mother for wanting to be like Gargi, the old woman-sage of

the Aryans, he dismissed her efforts to learn Sanskrit as the: 'Crow trying to be a swan.'

'Tell me, truly,' mother asked Clayton, 'does he go to prostitutes.'

Clayton did not answer this question, but hung his head down.

I sensed that Clayton, being father's orderly, saw him at close quarters, heard all the gup-shup about him, and knew more about him than anyone else. And yet, as I had earlier thought of father as a hero, because everyone salammmed him, and the Sahabs favoured him and he blew the whistle as referee at all the hockey matches, I did not want to believe that he was a bad man. I wished I was big enough to understand things. But I was not. So I remained a little fool, a clown, Pilpali Sahab, acquiring enough guile to fulfill the ambition to be a Brown Sahab like Dr. Khan Sahab when I grew up. If mother should leave father's house, as she sometimes said she wanted to, to become a Sadhani ascetic, I thought as I had learnt how to somersault several times over, I could join a Madari magician and earn paisas for mother and myself, by showing tricks which most Madari's children did not know.

Meanwhile, as the boys came to know that I was being favoured by three Holdars, Charat Singh, Lachman Singh and Hanumant Singh, they hung around the hockey ground, the Gym, and the school, hoping they might also received favours from my mentors.

Holdar Charat Singh was too busy a man to be approached.

Holdar Hanumant singh seemed distant and superior, because of his position as a learned man.

But as the boys were allowed by Holdar Lachman Singh to come and see the wrestling matches between the young recruits, and I was being taught to wrestle, they asked the Gym Master, through Brute, whether they could also be taught Kushti. wrestling.

‘If you all get your parents to give you langotis,’ agreed Lachman Singh. ‘But have a bath before you come—and after. And you can

wrestle in the Akhara, after the recruits have finished.

It was generally getting to be dark by the time the recruits finished.

This suited the boys of the follower's lane, as they found the evening shadows convenient for various secret practices.

They would wrestle as long as Holdar Lachman Singh was present.

After he left, they would fell the opposite boy and lie onto him, struggling to put him on his back, which was the sign of victory.

They had chosen their teams: Chotta against Rehmet Ullah: Ali

I was left out again.

One day, however, Ali conceded:

'Come I will take you on!'

I readily agreed.

After a few strokes of his arms on my shoulders, in the style of the famous Gama Phalwan, he demolished me with one swoop, until I fell and lay on my back.

I was resisting his attempts to turn my face upwards.

Soon I found that he was not trying to put me on my back, but was rubbing himself against

me. And I felt his penis near my anus, where he had moved my langoti on to the side.

I did not want to say, 'Don't do it!' because I felt he would never wrestle with me again. And yet I thought he was doing to me what Munshi had tried to do.

I began to sob, through fear of mother finding out, as I lay face downwards.

The other boys on top of their opposites were also doing what Ali was doing to me. Only I could not see clearly what they were doing. I could only hear the heavy breaths.

Suddenly, I shrieked at the thrust of Ali's hard looli.

They all stood up.

Chotta's penis was erect outside his langoti. I ran home sobbing.

'Wait little brother!' Brute called me. 'Wait, I am coming.'

I did not stop till I reached the deorhi and cried:

'Mother look what Ali tried to do to me!'

She noticed my langoti.

'What curse has prospered against us,' she said, 'that I gave you such good looks!'

And for weeks together I was not allowed to go out anywhere.

I would be deposited in the verandah by Clayton after he had brought me back from school on the bar of the cycle. I gazed out to see if I could touch someone, play with something, but I was denied contact by the space which divided me from the world outside our house. I saw the hockey sticks stacked up in the corner of the verandah and knew they did not belong to anyone now. I wanted to ride my stick horse, but as I had ridden it in the courtyard again and again, and really wanted to ride it near the Gym, I dropped it. I wanted to be put on the swing, but mother was busy with her chores. I wanted to play with the crows which alighted by the kitchen, but they picked up some crumbs, caw-cawed and flew away. I opened my books and began to mumble the tables till the echo of my voice bored me. Then I wanted to read the English vocabulary book to show off to my mother my knowledge of 'git-mit', but she was busy sifting lentil from the chaff for the evening meal. My brother Brute had gone out to his

friends and the boys would all be playing with marbles, or Thippi, or Kabadi, and I was not allowed to be there. I felt lost in the silent vacuum of the house, as a sepoy might feel who was punished for some offence and put behind iron bars in a room in the quarter guard jail.

I would begin to read aloud to drown my lostness.

I would get up, go to Biti's cot, and begin to play with his looli, until he woke up and cried.

Mother would come and smack my bottom.

I would whine.

In order to reconcile me, she would go to the 'Oh kuch' box and bring me some almonds or pista or sweets.

Often, in those days, father would go away to the Sadar Bazar for his walk from the office. And when he came back, I would have gone sulkily to sleep.

Sometimes aunt Gurdevi, the wife of father's colleague Babu Chattar Singh, would be there in the verandah with mother when I came back from school. And as she did crochet work

on a table cloth, she would tell me stories about Baba Farid, a Pathan Saint of Pak Pattan, near the village of Chakwal, where she came from, who had sat in a dark chamber for twelve years, every day, and had seen God.

Mother would recount the story of how she had gone visiting, away from our house in Amritsar, come back and found the Fakir Sain Lok, his hand over Des as he slept on his cot, and then walk away and disappear in the back room.

Gurdevi improved on mother's tale by recounting the miracle of Guru Nanak—how he wanted to cross a river of Punjab, and there was no boat, when a big fish appeared and carried him and his companions, the musicians, Bala and Mardana, across the river, on its back.

And I would ask Gurdevi if these tales were true. She said: 'That is what my mother told me. Guru Nanak was a good man. So God gave him everything. And he gave everything he was given to everyone.'

I was fascinated by God, though frightened of his invisible presence. I feared that he might come silently and take me away as he had taken away my little brother, Prithvi. Unless I could be good like Guru Nanak. To be good I would have

to go and live in the village with Grandpa Nihalu. But I wanted to be a Sahab. That may be possible if I staved in this very house, learnt enough angrezi, and some Padre Sahab might take me to Vilayat as father's Head Master Padre wanted to take him to study there. But to be anything at all I must first grow to be a big boy. And that was not possible unless I could play games. This I was not being allowed to do, so that I may be saved from boys like Ali thrusting their looli into my back

Mother arranged to get Clayton to fetch Helen, the daughter of Jimmie, the bandsaman, to play with me, as she did not want me to go and mix with the 'rough boys' of the follower's lane.

She seemed to have sensed that, because she did not wanted me to cling to her, she might wean me away from my morbid weeps, through some happy sport. She knew that, apart from her, I had liked Maya, daughter of Dr. Balmukund. But it was too far for the child to come. Helen was nearer.

She is dark,' mother said. 'You will not like her. But she will help me with sweeping and dusting. I will train her. I will give her food and pay. And she will be a good playmate for you.'

If she is sweeping and dusting, then when will she play with me?' I asked.

'Acha, first she will play with you. Then clean up. In our big house, she will learn how to behave like one of us. Then I will teach her to saw on the angrezi machine...'

Helen came.

She was shy.

Clayton said to me: 'She is seven. She will be like your elder sister.'

I decided, inside me, that I would one day hug her, as Hans had hugged Draupadi, when she came home to us in up Amritsar after the marriage.

Clayton joined us in the hide and seek game. So Helen was not shy with me. And we all laughed when she found out my trick of not closing my eyes properly, before she went to hide, and I caught her in my arms in the hall. I felt I wanted to cling to her. Even touch her between the legs. And put my cheek against hers. But then I was frightened of these feelings, as

mother might find out. But, I liked Helen coming.

My happy sports were stopped when father came, looking grim, and said!

‘Some Pathans have taken away the Mem of the Jarnel Sahab of Peshawar Brigade. One company of each Paltan is looking around in the hills behind our barracks. The thieves demand one lakh ransom to give the Mem back. They have sent a letter written in Pushto.’

‘Last year,’ Clayton said, ‘they had taken away the station Master of Rawalpindi.’

‘Good that Karnel Longdon was transferred to Simla,’ father said. ‘His Mem and Baba will be safe.’

‘They have taken our country by force, these Ferungis!’ mother said. ‘Let them face Pathan bullets!’

‘But Maji—what has the Mem done to deserve being taken away?’ Clayton said.

‘Sins of the father will be visited upon the children’, as you christians believe’, said father looking at mother with a smile. ‘Anyhow, I have to be back in the office. And you Clayton, come, as there may be messages to carry. No Pathan

will take you away, even though you have curly hair...'

I was excited by the drama. 'The shock of the strange news made my body warm. I wanted to go out, with the Paltan to look for the dacoits, though I dare not say so. I could now be Raja Rasalu, the conqueror.'

Clayton said: 'I will take Helen with me to her home in case her parents worry.'

'But she is dark,' mother said. 'And the Pathans know there is no ransom possible from a poor bandsman's daughter.'

I felt that, for all her family's suffering, and her own agony at father going to bad women, she was being unkind to this little girl.

She conceded some sweets out of fear I would begin sulking.

'I know you want to share everything with other children', she said, after Helen had gone. 'And I would give them equal portion to what I give you. But your father is tight-fisted. All the good things in the 'Oh Kuch' box have come as gifts from sepoys. or Afsars or Pathans. Let us hope the Sahabs will reward him one day for his slavery to them. And he will become open-handed.'

My father was tightfaced for days. And he said nothing to mother except: 'Food! Milk! Food! Milk!'

She looked at him and out of fear of his anger, she remained silent.

Brute was allowed to go and play, so long as he did not go beyond the Gym.

I was still not allowed to go anywhere. And after news of the Mem's abduction, Des and I were not even sent to school. This prohibition made us feel that we were living in a world of terror.

Mother asked me to play with Biti, without pulling his looli. But when she was not looking, I would begin to pull his looli, as if it was a teat of a goat. Everytime she caught me doing this, she smacked my bottom, and I wept, whined and sulked, as it had become my habit to do whenever I was frustrated in any way.

Some days later, mother asked Clayton whether the Mem who had been kidnapped was found.

'Nahin Maji' he said, 'the Pathans who have taken the Mem away ask for two lakhs now

as ransom, when they had asked for only one lakh. Paltans are roaming around looking for them... Babuji went to Peshawar to see Dr. Khan Sahab and his Mem, both of whom the Pathans trust. But even they could not contact the kidnappers.

Mother said: 'I thought he went for a different reason. Why does he have to go to Peshawar? Why not someone else?'

Three days later father came back with his face less hard, his eyes mellower and he gave a basket of sweets to mother, saying:

'Mother of Hans, distribute the ladoos. I have done the work for the Sahabs. I got the Mem back. Subedar Major Garka Singh has brought the sweets because I got the Mem back when the Foj could not! They are in the deorhi.'

Subedar Major Garka Singh brushed his lion beard into shape, and said: 'Babu Lal Chand you are a wizard!'

Holdar Surian Singh caressed his big tummy with his hand, and said: 'Babu Lal

Chand, you are a very clever man. We are young proud of you. Now the Sahabs will do everything you say... You ask for twenty five acres of land for me. And fifty acres for Subedar Major Garka singh Bahadur, in the new canal colony in Lyallpur. I will give some land in dowry to my daughter—otherwise she is too fat and no one will take her in marriage...'

Everyone smiled.

I wondered if Holdar Surjan Singh's daughter was like my sister-in-law Hans' wife, Draupadi, who spoke through her nose.

Shamasuddin, the ironsmith, said: 'I want no land, I want to go to Mecca on Haj. Get me a prize in cash from the Sahab. My son, Salammat Ullah, is big enough to do the work of the Paltan now...'

Father said. "Han, it was his son Salammat Ullah, with his motor bycycle, who was able to take me right near the hideout of the kidnappers. For his son's work he deserve a prize.'

'But how did you find out where they were?'

Father smiled. Then he winked at Subedar Garka Singh and said: 'Dumbri told me where they were.'

I remembered seeing Dumbri once near father's office. He wore the red coat of the

Tommy's uniform and Salwars of the Pathans, wrapped in puttees, on the shins, a turban tied on Kullah of gold thread, and a wooden rifle in his hand, with coins of all kinds nailed on it.

He asked for bakshish from the Sahabs after he saluted each one, smartly like a sepoy and he would amuse us children by giving orders like a Tommy sargent to an imaginary platoon of sepoys whom he was training.

Father whispered: 'He spies for both sides.'

'Do the Sahabs know this?' Holdar Surjan Singh asked.

'No! It is our secret.'

'Acha,' said the fat man, 'don't let anyone else know apart from the three of us. Otherwise, your enemies will accuse you of also being a spy.'

Father said: 'There is danger' of that happening, anyhow. But to offset their attack, I have got for five of us Numbrias, the Meritorious Service Medal from the Sarkar: Subedar Major Garka Singh, Holdar Surjan Singh, Holdar Shamsuddin Ullah, Holdar Charat Singh, Holdar Lal Chand.

Holdar Surjan Singh said: 'Now our enemies will say: The oldies should be retired...

Babu Chhattar Singh is accusing me of selling stores in the bazar. And that Pandit Permanand, Head priest of our regimental temple, accuses you of eating beef. He wants the rank of Holdar'.

Father said: 'That is how we lost our freedom again and again. One Indian turning against the other. The heirs of Maharaja Ranjit Singh murdered each other. And the Angrezi soj took the whole country. Long before the Ferungis came, one Indian Raja or Nawab fought the other. As for the Pathans they came down from Afghanistan, every now and then, looted the land and went back, six times in ten years and looted the Mughal Badshah in Delhi... Nadar Shah came from Iran and took away the Peacock throne and jewels and rubies and gold and diamonds. And we Hindus and Muslims went on believing in Kismet.'

I had heard the talk against father. But now that he was a hero, I felt Holdar Surjan Singh was wrong when he feared the enemies would say bad things about father. I wanted to be like him and go and talk to the Pathans face to face.

When mother heard from me what father had told his friends, she said: 'He is really a coward. He dare not go near the Pathans. May be he sent Dambri, who is the Sahab's agent, for

good money. That fake fakir will also get something from the Pathans. He is on both side.

So Dumbri was a spy. And father had used him to get the Jarnel's Mem back. Mother was good and could say hard things about bad people. To do something in the cantonment, one had to be clever like father, cunning like Dambri, and not good like mother. Every one wanted a reward from the Sahabs. The Sahabs liked those who served them. They had taken Grandpa Nihalu's land away and given it to his cousin brother Harbans Singh, because Grandpa had fought the Ferungis, and Harbans singh had sided with them. My innocence was disappearing in the face of the victory of the spies, the Sahabs and their slaves. I realised that the Ferungis, has more guns than the Paltan. That was why my father was on the Pathan's side.

The euphoria of happiness of father and his Numbrias was dissolved when soon, one evening, Dumbri came to our house.

Father had gone out to the Sadar Bazar.. So Dumbri waited in the hall. I wanted to play with

his rifle. But, unlike his usual jolly self, he was solemn.

Mother offered him tea in a glass specially meant for Muslim untouchables who came to our house, but he refused it. He did not also eat the almonds and pistas which mother put before him.

But soon father came and rebuked mother for not putting the hurricane lamp in the hall.

Dumbri did not salute father as he used to, but sat glumly in the dark.

'I have heard the news!' father said, 'It is terrible.' And he turned to us:

'Children, you go inside, eat your food and go to bed.'

We left the elders alone and went to the kitchen.

Mother was surprised to see us.

Go and fetch that glass from the hall, Des,' she said

'I will go ' I said. And I ran back.

I heard Dumbri shouting: 'My brothers will kill me... And you also Babuji... They will take revenge on us for what the Goras have done...The Sahabs are fools to kill innocent Pathans who had gathered in a Jirga in Hoti

Mardan. They were not the kidnappers...'

I ran back to mother and told her what I had heard.

She came rushing out of the kitchen to the hall.

'Now, they will take eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth!' Dumbri was saying.

'Hai! Hai! Rabba! what has happened?' she cried.

'Sister—the Ferungis are mad!' Dumbri said. 'The Goras opened fire on a Jirga and killed thirty Pathans to punish them for taking the Mem away. But the ones killed were not those who took the Mem away...'

'Let us go and see Karna Cadell Sahab,' father said. 'I will ask Subedar Major Garka Singh to come with us and apologise.'

'You are risking your life,' Dumbri said. 'I will go separately. I will leave this wooden gun here... You come with a platoon... The Pathans may be on the prowl. They know that you and I have negotiated the ransom...'

'Acha, let us see Subedar Major Sahab first—anyhow!'

Mother began to sob, taking her dupatta to her face.

I clung to her terror-stricken. Then I began to sob.

Des stood by, the forefinger of fear in his mouth.

After this news, the sepoy's went in fours on all roads and tracks for months together. And we were escorted to the school and brought back by Clayton and a sepoy.

SECTION—11

**I am wounded in the head by an accidental
stone**

All of us were told to be friends and not to quarrel with each other. And we did 'no Kuto' by joining our little fingers, each to each, and saying: 'No fighting anymore!'

So we went to school together and came back together. And, on surface at least, we talked to each other and were friends.

Des even held my hand and waited for me if I was left too far behind. Master Din Gul seemed to know that my father had been a negotiator with his Pathan brethren and got them the money. Also that he had advised the Sahabs not to shoot at Jirga in revenge, so he was extra nice to me, calling upon me, as Monitor, to read the lesson for the boys to repeat after me.

On our return home, I ventured out to the playground and was conceded the position of goal keeper. I donated three more half hockey sticks, one each to Chotta, Ali and Bakha respectively.

And I would ask mother for more roasted gram and freely distribute handfuls to all the players, giving Bakha portion of my almonds also, because it was he who had suggested that I be allowed to join the team, because I was the

son of the big Babuji, who had brought back the Mem Sahib of the Jarnel Sahab back.

The test of my capacity to defend the goal soon came when a match was arranged with the follower's lane boys of the Mescot, on a Sunday afternoon.

The prize for the team which might win, was a cake prepared by the Mess Khansamah, Fakhru, at the request of his son, Feroz, who was the Captain of the Mescot boys team.

Our team had been busy all the morning to put lime on the minature rectangular boundary of the hockey picth, by the off side of the Gym, where Holdar Lachman Singh allowed us to have our match.

I did not want to have my siesta after food, inspite of mother saying. 'Close your eyes for a while, son! It is a hot day!'

I reheased the work of the goal keeper by making the wooden pillars of the verandah into a goal, with Brute sending the rubber ball of Biti onto me.

As the rubber ball was soft and got past me, and I proved to be a bad goal keeper, I sat down and began to cry.

Luckily, father had gone, as usual, to peshawar. And mother put me to bed, lying down by my side. until my yes closed.

I was the first in the field in the late afternoon and busied myself piling stones to mark the goals.

For this meritorious service I was patted on the head by Chotta himself, who had appointed himself Kapatan of the team, as 'untouchable' Bakha was absent before the match.

When Bakha came, Chotta told him the lie that the Mess boys did not want a sweeper to be the Kapatan of the opposite team.

The two sides of six each shook hands, except that Bakha did not come forward to offer his hand.

Then our centre forward, Chotta, crossed sticks with Mescot team centre forward Feroze and the game began.

Bakha was inside-qtisde-right. He got the ball from Chotta. Then, though Chotta wanted him to pass the ball back to him, the sweeper boy went dribbling cleverly forward on his own, and scored a goal against the Mescot team.

Chotta was tight-faced as he did not want Bakha to be proved the best player and be made Kapatan.

He crossed sticks with Feroze on the middle line, dribbled past two other boys, and scored a second goal against the Mescot team.

Feroze seemed to be angry, as he shouted at his goal keeper and abused his whole team: 'Rape mothers! Rape sisters! You are no good!'

Again Bakha got hold of the ball, when Feroze was going past him, and, dribbling skillfully all the way against the Mescot team boys, went and scored another goal.

'Foul! Foul!' cried Feroze. 'Any goal scored by a sweeper boy is no goal!'

At this our Kaptan Chotta shouted: 'Rape-mother! You also have sweeper boy in your team. Your goal keeper—Johnnie!'

'Ja Salé!' shouted Feroze.

'Don't show me your teeth!' Chotta shouted. 'Dog!'

Feroze came and slapped him. Chotta attacked him with fisticuffs like a sepoy boxer.

Ali fell upon Johnnie.

Ram Charan began to throw stones at Feroze.

Feroze was near my goal, running away from the pitch to pick up the prize cake.

I followed him to get the cake before he could. •

Ram Charan's second stone hit the back of my head.

I shrieked and fell.

Feroze ran away with the cake.

Ram Charan threw more stones at him.

Brute ran to me where I had fallen.

'Blood! Ohe he is bleeding! Hai!' he cried.

Chotta, Ali, Ram Charan were chasing the boys of the Mescot team.

I felt the hot blood on my neck and cried at the sight of it on my hand.

Bakha came and knelt by me to see the wound.

'Like a fountain—the blood is flowing!' he said to Brute.

And after some hesitation and shaking his head in fear of consequences, he took me up onto his shoulder and hurried towards our house, Brute following him.

I was weeping, as I saw blood on my shirt, my shorts and mv hands.

'Maji! Maji! Mulky has been hurt!' he called.

No one came

Brute went in and told mother.

‘Bully is injured by a stone thrown by Ram Charan at Feroze!’

‘Hai! Hai! Eater of your masters!’ Mother shouted. ‘What curse has come on the head of my son!’

And when she saw Bakha bearing me, she abused him:

‘Vay, eater of your masters! Don’t you know you are untouchable! How dare you touch my son?’

‘Ma-ji— Ma-ji—he is hurt!’

‘Hai! Hai!’ she shouted as she saw the blood still running from my head.

‘Ma, it is not Bakha’s fault but Ram Charan’s, Brute said.

‘You are all enemies of my little son, I know! May God punish you! And now I will have to take off his clothes touched by a sweeper. I will have to purify him by sprinkling Ganga water on him.

She took me, laid me on the wooden platform in the hall, and began to take my blood-soaked clothes off.

‘Mother, he will die if we don’t stop his bleeding!’ said Bakha.

‘Vay Desia—go and call Dr. Balmukund!’

‘I will go,’ Bakha said. ‘I will go and ask Clayton to call the Doctor!’.

I was sobbing with the pain and to see blood on mother’s dhoti.

I saw mother bending over me, with tears in her eyes.

My eyes had not opened for more than a moment, before my head turned on a side. I had fainted.

When my eyes opened, I found myself on the earth and not on the cot.

Doctor Balmukund’s face was blurred before my half-shut eyes.

My heart beat pit a pat.

‘Kaka you will get well’, Doctor’s voice came.

Mother held my hand and made a sobbing sound with pouted lips.

Brute stood by her side, pale.

I moved my head from side to side. Doctor Balmukund covered my nose with a rubber cowl

I smelt a pungent smell.

There was ghaoon maoon in my belly'.

I wanted to vomit, but could not.

'Hai!' I cried.

'Serve you right! Fool' growled father. 'I told you not to go and play with those ruffians!'

'May I be your sacrifice, son,' I heard mother whine.

For several days and nights, i found myself sometimes on the cot and sometimes on the earth. And when I was lowered onto earth, mother beat her forehead and wept and cried: 'Hai! Hai! Shera! Don't die, my little son! Don't leave me at the mercy of your father.'

As I could sense mother's presence by me, I guessed I was not yet a ghost like Prithvi.

My head throbbed and I felt an ache on the temples.

Mother smoothed my forehead with gentle fingers. And I felt I wanted to be picked up by her, from the nostalgia of clinging to her bosom in Mian Mir.

'I must get Ali's mother to bring a little goat to sacrifice for you, son,' she said. 'Yama, God of

death wants you—so we must give him another little life to save yours. I will wave the meat over your head and throw it to the vultures. They are Yama's birds...'

From that time the fear of Yama taking me away because me with fear, so that, could I have after dreamt of the punishment, I would recieve in hell

Later, one morning, I saw the pink-red face of the big Daktar. Karnel Cooper Sahab, whom I remembered salaming on the way to school. Daktar Balmukund was talking to him in Angrezi. Father stood listening with stern face. Mother had covered her forehead. Brute was by the door, with Maya by him.

Karnel Cooper Sahab gitmitted again in Angrezi words with Dr. Balmukund.

He stroked my foreshead gently, touched my chin and smiled before he turned to go.

I could only understand the word: 'Hospital!'

After he went, I felt exalted that a big Angrez Daktar had been to see me. I feared I must be near death for him to have been called. And tears came to my eyes.

Mother put her head in her dupatta to hide her face.

‘Don’t kill him with your love!’ father said. ‘It is because of your ignorance that Karnel Cooper Sahab has advised a nurse. I will have to pay fees to her—worse luck!’ His face was a scowl. He shook his right hand as though he wanted to hit someone, anyone.

After the visit of Karnel Cooper Sahab, I found myself staring at the ceiling of the verandah of a room in the hospital.

I could hear sparrows chirping. And I saw a sallow faced Angrez nurse sitting on a basket chair by my side.

I realised that I was in a small room in the hospital of 38th Dogras Paltan.

Dr. Balmukund came with father.

‘Sister,’ the doctor said to Nurse. ‘Don’t let anyone disturb him. He must sleep and he felt my wrist. ‘Not so bad,’ he said ‘but feverish.’

My father came into the room and put his hand on the part of my forehead which was not covered with the bandage.

‘Didn’t I tell you several times not to play with those swine !’ he said in a half angry husk.

I closed my eyes.

‘Babu Lal Chand—don’t excite him!’ Dr. Balmukund whispered ‘He has narrowly escaped death. You must not be angry with him. It was no fault of his. Just an accident!’

And he began to apply the steel knob at the end of rubber tubes of his listening instrument to my chest.

He smacked his lips and went, taking father with him.

I remembered the words of Clayton: that serving the Sahabs had made father hard. Once the orderly had also told mother: Baji wants to mould his sons as the Gora Sergeant Major moulds the Tommy Goras by shouting and slapping..’

Some days later, nurse had stripped me and was rubbing a hot towel on my body.

Then she sat me up on the cot of which the back was lifted by a machine to support me in an upright position.

And she fed me a piece of double roti and

hot milk.

The backrest was loosened after I had eaten. And she stroked my body.

She put the thermometer into my mouth, looked at the watch on her wrist and patted me to sleep.

Days and nights came and went. The dull pain in my head was continuous.

The nurse, who had seemed to be a ghost, began to be a real woman. Simple. Straightforward. Sharp in her movements. Only looking at me gently when she stroked me to sleep or work me up. Her practical manner was unlike my mother's sentimental manner. But it was helping my wound to heal. I wished she would always be there to look after me.

And now as I lay supinely, getting well, I began to notice that the day was more alive than the night, because the sun came out and made everything glow.

During the sunny hours, the sparrows chirped and seemed lovely, as quite a few came, dyed in different colours, because some housewives had dyed them in bright colours.

The crows **caw cawed** and made the only noise in the silence of cantonment afternoons. The lizards walked on walls, not falling off by some uncanny hold their paws seemed to have on the flat surface. The water carrier came to fill water in large pitchers. The sweeper came to clean commodes. And nurse Rose was quicksilver.

In the nights, I felt dread spirits hovering about everywhere: Prithviraj: Sain Lok of mother's worship: Mian Mir whose tomb was in Lahore: and Googa Pir, the saint whom Bakhā had talked about as the Guru of the sweepers. After sleep, on waking up, I felt I had been dead during sleep, when I had fainted after being hurt. I felt anything might happen in the night. And one would not know why. One could just lapse. And I would call out: 'Mother!' pleading in whispers to her to come and lie by my side and soothe me to sleep. But she was nowhere near.

The day when the Sun shone became more important to me than the night during which I was haunted by ghosts.

Sister Rose had said to mother: 'Children must be fed and treated in routine manner. Indian women bring children up badly. They have them in their lap till late at night. So the little ones whine and cling to their mothers. And

mothers tell them stories of ghosts which frighten them. The Sahabs have brought new ways to treat children. They are not sentimental. They do not want mother to hug the child all the time. They put them in perambulators. At fifteen, every young boy or girl leaves the parent's home in Vilayat. Here we marry them off, before they are men and women. We give them dowry. The young depend on parents to do things for them. Even think their thoughts for them. So they never grow up.'

I had the sense that I had survived, because Sister Rose had given me food, medicines; water and milk at regular intervals.

And she had not done any sacrifice as mother had wanted to, by throwing meat brought by Ali's mother to the vultures after waving it round my head. She had written down my temperature everyday from the thermometer, for Doktor Balmkund, and noted the progress. And I had recovered. I might have been frightened to death, if I had been left with my fond mother, who beat her forehead in sorrow every time I was brought down to earth. But I wanted to get back to her as I knew that it was ultimately her caresses, kisses and pats that I wanted. And something from the 'Oh Kuch' box.

After a month or so, I was removed to our house. But sister Rose came to dress my head every morning, with Daktar Balmukund, and every evening, without him, to wipe me with a hot towel, to give me my milk and double roti and to put me to sleep.

Meanwhile, the news had spread that the 'Nuufa' (spark) was nearly snuffed out, but had survived. So there were many callers to see the survivor.

Nurse Rose had, of course, advised my father and mother 'not to allow any and every one to come near me!' 'And no one was to linger by my bed!'

I was asleep most of the time. But I could faintly remember the faces of father's Numbrias: Subedar Major Garka Singh, Holdar Surjan Singh, Sheikh Salamatullah and Chacha Ramzam and Babu Charat Singh. They touched my forehead. I tried to smile, but I had tears in my eyes to see their concern for me. Their solemn faces aroused me to self pity.

Also, I could faintly remember the faces of aunt Gurdevi, Clayton's mother, Ali's mother, Mrs. Jimmy, and her daughter Helen, all coming

in turn, and shedding tears as though I was on my death bed.

Mother followed the advice of Nurse Rose and sent them away, by giving them a ladoo each, saying: 'God has saved him! There is no cause for weeping any more.'

Chachi Rukmani, the wife of Dr. Balmukund came and helped nurse Rose once a week to change my bandage. Chachi Gurdevi helped mother to feed me, while mother was busy feeding Biti. And even Babu Chattar Singh melted towards our household, because of my near-death illness, and came to us to offer soft words of sympathy from behind his bushy beard.

Mother told me that the 'witch Gulabo,' the washerwoman mother of Ram Charan, whose stone had hit my head, had come, but was sent away with a boochar of abuse from father for 'not sending her son to school and for allowing him to become a budmash!' And both father and mother were moved when Bakha came with his father Lakha, his brother Rakha, and his sister Sohoni, along with Clayton who came bearing a basket of fruit on their behalf. Lakha, father of Bakha, asked mother to forgive Bakha for touching me by picking me up when I was hurt and bleeding.

Bakha was allowed by father to come and touch my forehead. Mother looked at him askance. Father said to her: 'As an Arya Samajist, I am against treating low caste people as untouchables! There are Hindus. Only their work makes them unclean.'

The rumour had also spread to the coppersmith brotherhood that I had 'nearly died!'

And though mother was against Chacha Piaru and Chachi Devaki coming all the way from Amritsar, father said neither yes nor no. And they came, their little daughter, Kaushalya, in Chachi Devaki's lap. As Devaki brought her child, mother seemed to be less hard, both in the way she looked at Devaki and spoke to her. And Chacha Piaru brought a silver image of a kitten for mother to give in appeasement of my guilt in throwing the live kitten in the well at Mian Mir. Mother said: 'After all, now the curse of God on him will be removed! He got hurt, because God was angry with him for killing that kitten. And she called Pandit Parmanand, whom everyone knew

to be hostile to father, and gave him the silver kitten. She said aloud, for everyone to hear: 'Your father pretends to believe in the Ved, Actually, he does not go to Arya Samaj Mandir, but to drink liquor in his club of contractors and gose to prostitutes.'

These words did not dissuade Chachi Devaki from keeping her head apron only half lifted before father. And I noticed their eyes meeting, as I had seen their eyes meeting on our arrival in Amritsar from Mian Mir, in Kucha Fakir Khana.

As Devaki sat by me and fed me, on Nurse Rose's advice, and put my head gently in her lap, and stroked my body to sleep, I loved her more than ever. I began to sit up, without getting tired, to move my hands and feet. I decided soon to become strong enough to play cards with her, to kiss her oval face with the big shining eyes. I insisted, when Chacha Piaru wanted to go back to Amritsar, that Chachi Devaki might stay, as I wanted to hear her sing lullalys to Kaushalya and Biti, as also I wanted her to sing to me those songs she had sung on Hans' marriage.

'She doesn't know real folk songs of the villages,' mother said, looking away as she washed the utensils. 'She has been brought up in

towns where her father was Babu in the Post Office... She only knows how to eat pan, play cards, gamble and make eyes on men!’

Luckily, Chachi Devaki had gone to visit Chachi Gurdevi when she said these things.

I realised again that mother was jealous of father’s fondness for Chachi Devaki.

This became more obvious when she began to tie a scarf around her head and complained of headaches.

So father arranged to send Chachi Devaki back home, in the care of Clayton, who was given special leave.

Father had cleverly sent her by the night train when I was asleep.

When I did not find her about in the morning, I knew she had been sent away. And I began to cry.

For the first time since he had stroked me as he bore me to the hospital, he sat by me and caressed me.

I guessed that he was moved to do this, in sympathy for my loss of Devaki’s tenderness.

Mother tried to outdo both Devaki and father by telling me stories of how Raja Rasalu of Sialkot recovered when he was wounded by his

enemies, and how he conquered the world by going away from his stepmother, who was as fair as Devaki and as evil.

I got compensatory strength from Nurse Rose, when I asked for her to come to me often. And though her visits cost father money, he agreed for her to come once a week.

After dressing my wound, she would sit by me, near where mother was plying the spinning wheel, and she would massage my body.

Then she would teach mother the Christian prayer to Yessuh Messih. And she told mother how God loved his only son, Jesus, whom he had sent down to earth, to atone for the sins of all men and women. "Suffer little children!" she said was the teaching of Jesus which Hindus don't believe. Because they want them to grow up to feed the Brahmins for their dead ancestors.

Mother seemed to believe her. But she told Sister Ross how I had thrown a kitten in the well, and could it be that I had been punished for this sin.

'Yessuh Messih had said', so Nurse Rose told mother, 'Children are weak. So they make mistakes. They are ignorant of their sins. Like dogs, cats, mice. They only have to be saved from doing wrong by faith in Yessuh Messih... They

only son of God! He is the saviour of the weak, the lowly and the forsaken.'

Sister Rose put a silver chain with a small silver cross round my neck and said: 'This will save him.'

I docilely accepted this token, but I knew of her earlier rejection of mother's tawizes and talismans and toonas as superstitions.

I asked myself whether I would always remain weak, and would need Yessuh Messih, or mother's great God Vishnu, or her goddess, stronger and above the cats, the dogs and the mice. I had been told by mother that if one prayed to the Gods, one could wipe out one's faults and grow to be a higher person—and if one did not pray and made mistakes one might be born as a lower animal in the next incarnation. In my confusion about my future in carnation, I felt consolation in the words she had uttered when she opened her eyes after prayers before her mandala:

'God Krishna came to me and said Mulky is my incarnation.'

Strangely enough, as these words exalted me when I was feeling weak and helpless, they became an echo augury and I always thought of myself as the new Krishna ever afterwards and felt vain and about my ancestry. Only when I

heard that the Rajas and Maharajas claimed to be the sons of the Sun did I feel how silly we all were to want to be gods, superior to other men.

From now on the don't's of father and mother increased. I realised that they were supposed to be in my interest. Like my not going near the Gym, or to the follower's lane, or to the barracks. I was told not even to step outside the house, unless Clayton was with me.

We had become children of terror from the atmosphere of bullets going off from one side or the other, the regimental route march, action hills, the roads, riverside even in the bazars.

'I don't know what new afflictions he will bring on himself and us!' father said seeing me sobbing, or sulking or rolling on the ground at any little affront to my dignity or denial of my wants.

'To be sure, he has a will of his own—and won't listen!' mother said.

I could see that, apart from her own anxieties for her young, mother always voiced fears for her children. Her eyes were always bent before father, who hovered over us all as a God. She was forever cooking, scrubbing utensils and praying

for the welfare of the family before the mandala, to invisible Gods behind the images.

I realised, then, that I was no longer the much loved, or pitiable, delicate child. I would have to be guided at every step against my foolishnesses. I was an 'unlucky boy,' 'always finding himself in trouble with something or someone or the other.' I became aware that as a child I was considered 'a savage'. I belonged to a wild tribe, which had to be punished as the Angrezi Sarkar punished the Pathan tribesmen.

The denial of my spontaneous impulses was, to some extent, forgotten, when Mama Dayal Singh, himself suspect as a foolish wanderer, who had once been known to be fond of a Christian nurse, and had to be married to a girl from a priest's household, came to see how I was.

He recited a verse of Guru Nanak, which said: 'We are all children lost in the world fair.' And as he said prayers on a rosary, morning and evening, and wiped out the image of him as a rogue, he was allowed to bear me to the river Lunda for an airing.

He even took me to a Gurdwara, on the birthday of Guru Nanak, and treated me to the ritual offering of sweet semolina-Kara Prashad. And as he sang hymns in a mellow voice, and talked about Guru Nanak's good deeds, quite a few Sikh households adopted him as a teacher, and asked him to their homes. In fact, father's own friend, the Sikh contractor in Nowshera, Sardar Doola Singh, took him to stay in his house. And he came back to us, laden with gifts of fruit. His tame as a good man spread, and even the Muslim Head Master of our primary school, and several Pathans, came to listen to him.

Ofcourse, mother was proud that her brother had reached God.

And father himself conceded a visit to one of Mama Dayal Singh's seances in the Sikh temple in Hoti Mardan.

I could not understand all this talk about God. I had been told by mother that he was 'an old man with a big white beard, whose spirit was in all the saints, and even in us, specially in children, who were innocent. And his incarnation, Krishna, had been incarnated in me.

But I was always frightened of God behind the pretended joined hand assent to his presence

by everyone, in case he should be like father, or Master Din Gul, or Cunningham Sahab who had swished his cane for my staring at him.

My main fault seemed to be my physical weakness. This seemed to be taken as the sign of my mental weakness also. But Mama Dayal Singh thought I was a clever child. And he was able to convince me that God was not cruel, but a gentle being, who was good to children, because children were like him, innocent, good and loving.

My belief in Mama Dayal Singh's God was soon suspended, when Master Din Gul refused to have me in the third primary class. He said: 'You have missed three months lessons!' And he sent me back with Clayton who had taken me to school on bicycle.

I could not stop weeping when I came home and sat down in a corner of the verandah. When father came from office, he was angry at my sulking and said: 'Master Din-Gul is right. You are unlucky. You were ill. And you have missed three months lessons.'

‘But was he not ahead of other boys as he has a good memory?’ mother said.

‘Acha, I will go and see the Head Master.’

Luckily, when he did go with me, and a test was taken before Master Din Gul, and I was asked to recite tables, I was able to recite all the tables except the last.

‘I will give him special tuition at home, father assured the Head Master.

So I was allowed to join the class.

I made one bold request after the oral examination:

‘Could Master Din Gul not beat me for my inability to use the cane on my class fellows?’

At this everyone, including Master Din Gul, laughed.

The Head Master Sahab said: ‘Ustad Din Gul: ‘Children should be punished if after caning they learn to be better behaved. But if a child becomes angry and worse behaved than before, then punishment will achieve the opposite of what the teacher wants. Punishment can break the child’s soul.’ I loved the Head Master for saying this, to Master Din Gul. As father was present, I thought he may also have listened to those words.

I was accepted on probation, though Master Din Gul said: 'If he cannot do all the sums I have taught to other boys, while he was away, I will not pass him in the annual examination.'

Convinced of my ability to memorise, father promised: 'In a month I will teach him and he will pass at the head of the class.'

In the period of convalescence and recovery from physical weakness to strength, I felt certain things more intensely than before. Maybe I was brooding a good deal. I felt that father was much more affectionate, giving us chocolates which he brought from Mescot, not as rewards but from the pleas we made for sweets. And as he was as loving as mother, I wished he could always be so. And we could be a happy loving family. I again thought of him as a hero in those days. And I did not sulk. I decided even to forget his harshness. I felt I would accept reasonable advice. I felt remorse for my always taking mother's side. I wanted to be fair to them both. And I sat with Brute, who was preparing for the fourth primary examination, to compete with him in diligence.

So when the annual examination was held at the end of the year, I came out first in the class, while Brute came third in his class.

And we were promoted, I to the 4th primary

class and Brute to the fifth primary class. Also Ismet Ullah had passed, second to me. Ali and most of the boys failed in the third primary class. but were promoted, as their parent bribed Master Din Gul with some gift or the other.

As Master Din Gul went to pray to Allah in the Mosque regularly every Friday, by special leave from the Head Master, I asked father how a man who prayed to God could take bribes.

Father did not answer.

Mother said: 'Don't ask him such questions. He says he is an Arya Samaji and yet takes gifts from the contractor Sardar Doola Singh.'

I realised that mother, the daughter of Nana Nihalu, who had lost everything because he had fought in the war against the Ferungis, was more good than father who was servant of the Sahabs, because as servant of the Sahabs, who also accepted baskets of fruit, cakes and other gifts from the contractors, he accepted bribes.

I knew, however, that my sense of justice was not just, I was partial to mother, because however foolish she was as against father who was a learned Babu, she was a simple peasant woman, goodhearted, and had in her the kind of love that

Mama Dayal Singh exuded. I forgave her superstitions, because she herself confessed: 'I am ignorant, because I was not sent to school in Daska village. But my father did teach me the words of Guru Nanak, who said: 'Love.'

SECTION 12

Lost Child in the Kaleshwar Village Fair in Kangra Valley

After I passed my examination it was suggested by Dr. Balmukund that a change of air would do me good.

My father ignored this suggestion for some time, as he had been complaining to mother about the expenses entailed by my illness.

Then, one day, Holdar Charat Singh came to ask father to get him fifteen days leave, as his ninety year old father had died in his home town, Nadaun, in Kangra Valley.

‘Will you bring me some ampapad?’ I asked him.

‘To be sure, son—but why don’t you come and fetch it for yourself?’

‘How?’ I said looking at him and then at father.

After a long silence, father said:

‘Acha—why not take him to Nadaun?’

‘We will give him good cow’s milk and make him the chubby boy he was before he was hurt.’

‘May I go and ask mother?’

‘To be sure, son, go and ask your mother... And if your father recommends me for leave, we will go day after tomorrow and get to Nadaun

well in time for the Baisakhi festival near Kaleshwar temple on the river Beas.'

'You can't go to a festival, Holdar Charat Singh, after you father had died!' father said.

'Babuji—he was ninety years old. In our parts we celebrate the death of an old man and take him to the cremation ground with a band playing in front of the funeral procession. We are Rajputs. We have learnt to die in the war of good against evil. From our ashes will come more life. Good grain...' 'What good words he speaks,' mother said. 'Holdara you are blessed indeed!'

'What good words he speaks,' mother said 'Holdara you are blessed indeed!'

'Acha, Let him get the fresh air of Kangra Valley,' father conceded. 'The water of the Beas is refreshing.'

I recalled Chacha Piaru telling us children about his stay in the palace of the Raja of Nadaun, when he had gone to make a silver chair for the heir of the great Maharaja Sandar Chand.

I could hardly sleep that night in anticipation of going, going—going somewhere, after the confinement in home through my illness. Brute sulked because he was not to be sent with me. So father said to him: 'Acha, we will

send you to Amritsar. You will go with Holdar Charat Singh and Bully. I will wire your Chacha Piaru to fetch you from Amristar station.'

After one night irksome rail journey, we got to Amritsar station at dawn.

Chacha Piaru came in answer to father's wire and took Brute home. I was envious as Brute would be near my beloved Chachi Devaki.

But soon I was in the train to Pathankot, eating the Puris which Chacha Piaru had brought with hot potato-gram curry, and a jalebi from the basket which Holdar Charat Singh was taking as gift for his family.

At Pathankot, we got into a small toy train which passed through Kangra Valley by neat little villages.

Strange to me was the sight of the huge mountain ahead, covered with snow, with the valley below, interspersed by neat little stone houses, with sloping slate roofs.

'Daula Dhar,' Holdar Charat Singh offered. 'Where Shiva sits with his matted white hair. The valley is his spouse, Parvati, sitting below, worshipping him.'

‘Does God Shiva ever came down and beg for food as do the Sadhus who call out ‘Bham Bham Bhole Nath,’ in Amritsar lanes?’ I asked.

‘No—he lives on top of the mountain. His voice is thunder. His breath is lightning. His love is the rain, which comes down and gives us water for the rice fields...’

I sensed that he was making up a story for me, as mother made up stories about Aga Khan becoming a whale and coming to Bombai to receive rupees which his followers threw in the sea for him to swallow.

My eyes were full of wonder: Small hamlets near rice fields: mango groves: clumps of yellow bamboos such as I had never seen: purple round stones: stretches of little green rice fields, with hedges of blossoming small trees.

‘What are those flowers, Chachaji?’ I asked.

‘Almond trees in flower. Soon the flowers will become nuts. And children will loot the almonds, eat and become s rong.’

I wished I could stay here forever.

From under the shadow of the high Kang: ... Fort, we went in a tonga, with Chacha Prithi Singh, the twin brother of Holdar Charat Singh, who had come to receive us, towards Nadaun.

‘How far is Nadaun?’ I asked.

‘Only ten kos, Munoo,! Holdar Sahab’s brother said.

‘Angrezi Sarkar has built this road where there was only a track in the time of our Maharaja Sansar Chand,’ Holdar Charat Singh said.

And now my eyes entered the radiances beyond the horse’s feather crest. The tongawallah struck the chabuk on the horse’s back to make it mount the ups. The poor lean beast was sweating, and its flanks shone in the light of the midday sun. I wished the Sarkar had opened a railroad to Nadaun, to avoid the horse having to carry us. And when I saw some Paharia coolies bearing heavy sacks of grain, as they trudged on the side of the hill road, I felt they should have mule carts like the ones in the cantonment to carry big weights.

Was it the fatigue of the journey, or the empathy with the beasts of burden, that put me to sleep? I did not know.

But I was awakened before the Jwalamukhi temple, by the shaking of my torso by Holdar Charat Singh.

‘Come, son, and look at the miracle!...’ he said. ‘The goddess has appeared as flame from the earth!... Come! See!’

To be sure, there was a flame rising from the dark cavern of the shrine. Where the pilgrims were bending down and putting their foreheads on the stone plinth in worship.

'She appeared here centuries ago' Holdar Charat Singh said. 'And she has protected the folk against earthquakes. Only, people lost faith in her some years ago. Then there was an earthquake in Kangra Valley. And thousands died. Even the walls of the big fort cracked...'

I looked at the leaping flames. I could not believe the story about the goddess. Ismet Ullah, the son of the Muslim uncle, Salamatullah had told me that the prophet Muhammad 'did not believe in idol worship' 'God was invisible and lived, in paradise.' So the image of the goddess behind the leaping Flame of Jwalāmukhi seemed to me to be make-belief. I did not want to annoy Holdar Charat Singh with questions. Specially, because he generously gave me Jalebies after a luscious Pahari meal from a cookshop near the temple of the Mother Goddess.

'Not far to Nadaun now,' he said, as we got onto the tonga again. And he put my head on his lap and patted me to sleep.

I awoke by a little house on a promontory

by the river Beas.

Chacha Charat Singh took me to touch the feet of his wrinkled old mother, and his wife who had drawn her head-cloth over her forehead against my eyes.

I honoured the women in the Dogra manner by falling at their feet. But I wished they were Mems like Dr. Khan Sahab's wife, who shook hands with every one.

Then two nephews of Holdar Charat Singh took me to the river, while my guardian became busy with preparations for the ceremonial throwing of his father's ashes in the Beas river.

I gazed at the waters of the river from the bank. The fast stream was singing a song, as the waves twisted themselves over each other like white snakes and rushed along. Wisps of cloud hung from the blue sky overhead. Beyond some small hills, there was a boat bridge across the Beas, from Jwalamukhi side towards Nadaun. And, above a low wall of violet purple stones, there arose a small square palace uplifted by the sikhara of a temple on the side.

I had been told by Holdar Charat Singh not to bathe in the Beas, as I had been ill. I touched the water with my hand and found it ice cold. The boys took off their clothes and dived in,

splashing and swimming and laughing as they crossed the width of the river. I wished I had not been sick and had dived in, as the happy Paharia boys had done.

I consoled myself with the vision of the endless expanse of the Daula Dhar, the mighty ghost of Shiva high up above the green earth, frightening in its miraculous splendour.

‘We will go fishing in the pool,’ the older boy said to me.

‘He is Bansi and my name is Jayaram. We will give you a string with a hook and a bait...’

I knew that the Beas river was one of the five rivers of Punjab. It flowed into the Indus further down. And the Indus went into the sea. I wanted immediately to get well enough to float down towards where the river went, and then onto the sea and beyond to Vilayat.

‘Chachaji asked us to bring you back quickly for food,’ Jayaram said.

I awakened from my vision of flowing down to the sea. I knew I would not be going to the sea until I grew up. But the very thought of the sea brought me the hope of going one day to distant unknown worlds, specially where the Sahabs came from.

The ceremony for uplifting the soul of Holdar Charat Singh's father to paradise, was held in the temple of the palace of the Raja of Nadaun.

An old Brahmin was fetched from the village and given a feast of rich food. Specially sweet Khcer made of milk-sugar-rice, of which the Brahmin priests were said to be very fond.

I did not want to go to the feast as I was afraid of seeing the ghost of Holdar Charat Singh's father possessing the body of the Brahmin, who would eat the food on the dead man's behalf. But his brother Prithi Singh had said that the Raja of Nadaun would come to the feast. And I was curious to see what a Raja looked like. So I went

As there were many guests, the fear of the spirit of the dead man behind the Brahmin disappeared. The ghost could not possess all of us. In fact when I saw a lean old man, who was chief guest, seated by the image of God Krishna, I saw him smiling and could not imagine he had a ghost inside him. I could not believe that the dead came back to eat food through a Brahmin's mouth, as all the elders said they did.

I was more interested in the Raja, who was dressed in a green Angrezi suit, with white necktie, but a white silk turban on his head, and socks on his feet, his full moustache curiously painted green. I had never seen a person with a moustache painted green. And I wondered why the prince had coloured the brief bristles above his upper lip in green colour. Musalman Mullahs dyed their beards in orange henna. Old men dyed their white hair black. But this man was unique in having dyed his moustache green. Maybe it was to match the colour of his moustache to the colour of his suit.

I stared at him. Then I withdrew my gaze. But he noticed me, because of my Peshawari Kurta-Salwar and velvet brocaded waistcoat. He asked Holdar Charat Singh's brother who I was. And, on knowing that I was the son of the 'Shadow Karmel Sahab' of 38th Dogras, Babu Lal Chand, he had me brought up to sit next to him.

He patted me on the back and said:

'Munoo, you must come and play with my son, Rajkumar Jai Singh, who is about your age. How old are you?'

'I am near seven,' I said.

I brought the good manners I had learnt in

our deorhi and sat docilely by him, eating only a few morsels of kheer and nothing else.

And, in between the morsels, I looked at a big painting of Krishna dancing with the gopis on the wall of the temple.

‘My uncle Piaru thathiar from Amritsar told me, he used to come here,’ I dared to say to the Raja Sahab.

‘Han! Han! Son! He is a good craftsman. All the silver utensils we have were made by him...So you are thathiar by origin.’

‘My ancestors made the gold plating on the Golden temple,’ I boasted, as uncle Piaru had told me the story of the building of the Sikh shrine in Amritsar.

‘To be sure!’ the Raja said. ‘And what are you going to be a thathiar or a Babu?’

‘I want to go to Vilayat,’ I answered.

‘Go, son, and become a Barrister. When you come back, I will make you my Dewan.’

I was sweating with the pride of the Raja condescending to talk to me.

Secretly, I decided that I would persist in chewing this morsel of prophecy, until I may be strong enough, in mind and body, to go to London town and become a Barrister.

Bansi and Jayaram asked me to come and play with Rajkumar Jai Singh in the playground of the palace.

Their father, Prithi Singh, who was orderly of the Raja, told me on the way:

‘Raja Sahab is a strange man. He can be very kind and very cruel. He does not trust many people. And we have to say, ‘Ji huzoor,’ to everything he says. Never say ‘Nahin’ to him. Few people know that he is the descendent of Maharaja Sansar Chand by the Gaddan shepherdess with whom the Maharaja fell in love. So this family of Nadaun Raja is not in the real line. The successors to the gaddi are Rajas of Lambagraon.’

‘I know Jamada,’ Suchet Singh, who comes from Lambagraon.’

‘He is the youngest brother of the Raja of Lambagraon!’

‘But how can a prince agree to be merely a Jamadar in the foj?’ I asked.

Prithi Singh was silent. My remark was a reflection on his own exalted family. After a while, he said:

'We Dogras fell on bad days after the death of Maharaja Sansar Chand. The Gurkhas of Nepal attacked us and surrounded Kangra Fort. Maharaja Sansar Chand asked the Maharaja of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, to come to his help. Ranjit Singh sent a foj. The Gurkhas ran away. After that the Punjab Maharaja Sarkar ruled. And Sansar Chand had to give his two daughters, by his Gaddan wife, in marriage to Maharaja Ranjit Singh...The Ranis proved to be true to the honour of Rajputs. They were the only Ranis who became Suttrees on the funeral pyre of Maharaja Ranjit Singh when he died. Different from Rani Jindan, the mother of Maharaja Daleep Singh who took lovers after her husband's death.'

I was absorbed by the story, specially the mention of the two hill Ranis burning themselves on Maharaja Ranjit Singh's funeral pyre. I felt that my grandfather Nihalu's admiration for Maharaja Ranjit Singh was as slavish as my father's salaams to the Sahabs, and as Chacha Prithi Singh's devotion to the Nadaun Raja. I had heard Holdar Charat Singh talk of the Dogra's descent from heroes of Mahabharat to father. Did the women not feel pain just before being burnt?

I thought these thoughts, but did not say anything to Chacha Prithi Singh.

'Look there is Rajkumar Jai Singh-say 'Jay Jay' to him,' our chaperon advised us.

All of us three boys joined hands to the prince, who was dressed in a gold embroidered coat, tight pyjamas and had a gold work boatcap on his head, with goldthreaded shoes on his feet.

A small dark grasscutter man brought a pony behind him. He lifted him and put him on the pony, adjusting his feet on to the small footrests of the saddle.

'Run after me!' the prince ordered the boys. And he himself went off on a trot.

The boys ran after him.

So did Prithi Singh.

Not only had I been unwell and could not run, but I was outraged by the Rajkumar's manner and refused to follow. My father is a big Babu, I said to myself. And when I grow up I shall ride a horse of the cavalry Paltan in the cantonment. I was aware of the injustice of the Raja's son riding a pony and we three being asked to run behind him. How could this boy be superior, the son of a Raja who looked funny with his moustache dyed green?

After some more ceremonies to please his ancestor, who had become resident of heavens, Chacha Charat Singh had to take the earthen jar of his father's ashes to immerse in the river Beas, 'near the Shiva temple, in Kaleshwar village,' he said.

I said: 'But the river Beas is here in Nadaun!'

'Han, son, the river is here. But it becomes more holy when it touches the feet of God Shiva's temple near Kalēshwar, not far from Jwalamukhi... Besides, on Baisakhi day there is a fair in Kaleshwar, to celebrate the cutting of the wheat harvest. So we will have to wake up early. And we will float down the river by boat...'

I was so excited about the promised outing that for a long time that night I could not sleep. I could hear the sounds in the kitchen where Chachi Yasodha, the wife of Chacha Charat Singh, was preparing the food for the picnic on the Baisakhi Day.

As we floated down the river, in the royal boat of the Raja of Nadaun, lent to Chacha Charat Singh's brother, I forgave the Raja's arrogant son, who had asked me, and the two nephews of Chacha Charat Singh, to run after

him as he trotted away on his pony.

The boat was gaily coloured. And two Paharias labourers were rowing it in turns, one seated in front and the other at the back. Chacha Charat Singh, his brother Prithi Singh, their two wives, Jayaram, Bansi and myself, all sat in the middle, on a throne-like diwan.

I could sense the whispers of cool breeze above the fast waves, interrupted by the splashing of the oars. The wheatfields on both sides of the river were pucca brown. Beyond the fields, above the hills, on the right, rose the giant Daula Dhar. I stared at the snows on the peaks of the high uprise to see if I could trace the outline of the God's body. Only strings of his ashen hair seemed to straggle down in snow to indicate that he might be there.

I had the hunch that the elders were frightened of the big mountains. So they made them into Gods. And then they joined hands to them, praying to Gods not to be angry and destroy them by sending fearful thunder and sparks of lightning. The small urn of ashes of the old father of Chacha Charat Singh was also being taken to be thrown into the water near the Shiva Temple in Kaleshwar for the same reason. The ashes would become holy when thrown in

the river at the feet of the temple. And the spirit of the old dead man would travel down the Beas river, which mingled with other rivers and then went onto the sea. There it would rise to be a cloud on the sky. I remembered how I always saw the shapes of old men, with long beards, in the clouds, as I lay in bed in the courtyard of our house in Nowshera cantonment. In spite of the fact that there had been happy celebrations for the soul of the old man, I still felt the dread of the spirit which might be in the ashes. So I went to sit by the oarsman ahead.

And I began to stare at the vibrant earth on both sides of the river, where bundles of harvested wheat were stacked up, by little hamlets, with bamboo groves on the sides.

I saw some cranes flying away from the left bank of the river, as our boat floated down. And, in a while, a drove of parrots flew away from a mango grove, as though frightened by the sound of our oars. And then a couple of white spotted deer, with little ones, ran across the field.

‘Oh!’ I shouted: ‘Deer!’

Prithi Singh said: ‘We will go and hunt them if the Raja Sahab lends us his gun.’

I could see the pointed hulk of the temple L, the Beas river from afar. And as the boat got nearer, there were visible, crowds of people on the right hand side. Many of them were bathing in the water. The women were in groups behind curtains, in dhotis, their wet drapery clinging to their bodies. The men, naked, except for strips of cloth between fore and aft, hung around, staring at the women. The children were splashing the water in the puddles here and there.

One of our boatmen jumped out and tied the boat to a boulder. Chacha Charat Singh and his brother mumbled some prayers and threw the pitcher of the dead man's ashes into the river. And we were helped out of the boat and began to walk towards the Shiva temple.

I saw some young girls come singing across tracks with dolls in their hands. Each of them held two dolls. And they were singing a song in a longdrawn wail.

I asked Chacha Charat Singh what they were singing.

'All girls weep before they go to their husband's house,' he said.

Prithvi Singh imitated the song and said: 'They are singing:

“We are birds in a flock, flying away from our homes to the houses of our husbands”. ‘They are sad in their happiness.’

‘And the dolls?’ I asked.

‘One doll is called Ralla—he is bridegroom. The other doll is called Ralli—she is bride. They will immerse the dolls in the river and pray that they are married to good husbands. Then they will bathe in the river and go back to their families.’

This custom was strange to me. I could understand the sadness of the lilt of the song, because I recalled that my sister-in-law Draupadi had wept bitterly when she had left her father’s house in Gujranwala, tied to the apron of my brother Hans.

Also, I remembered the words which Bakha used to sing from the story of Heer and Ranjah, when Heer was taken away in a palanquin on being married off to someone and not to her lover Ranjah.

The girls were dressed in lovely clothes. I thought of the soiled clothes they would wear when they would become wives. And then they would not have time to sing, as they would be working in the kitchens, in the fields, or fetching water from the well in earthen pitchers.

A durrie was spread on a corner of the plinth under a big pipal tree for the family to rest.

Chacha Prithi Singh took the females to the Shiva Temple.

Jayaram and Bansi said they were going to bathe.

I nudged Chacha Charat Singh to take me in the direction in which I wanted to go, to the sound of the dhum-dhum-dhum-dhum of the big drum. And when we got there I asked the drum beaters, who were naked except for loin clothes, to let me beat the drum.

'You are too small, son,' Chacha Charat Singh said.

I consoled myself, after a while, by leading Chacha Charat Singh to the roundabout, which was squeaking on the wheel, to which were adjusted box seats, filled with parents and children.

'I want to go on the roundabout,' I pleaded.

Chacha Charat Singh conceded my wish. He paid an anna for each of us, when the roundabout stopped. And, we got into a box. I was nervous I would fall down, but I was excited. My body was sweating with the heat, with the sun above, and the pleasure inside.

After we came down, I directed my guardian towards the sweet shops. Chacha Charat Singh took me there and bought jalebies for the whole family, giving me one which he got as huckster's profit.

Then we saw his wife and sister-in-law, sitting by a stall and trying on coloured glass bangles.

Their faces were hooded in their dupattas. The Holdar has no use for such luxuries as they were buying.

And we drifted towards a bazar of cookshops selling puris, Kachoris, Golgappas, and cloth shops and wayside stalls full of Japanese toys.

In the 'kachar-machar' and 'hugger mugger,' as my father called the jostling of crowds, every one was agog, eating food, drinking sherbets, singing, going to bathe, or having their fortunes told by the palmists.

The dust raised by the feet of the pilgrims irked Chacha Charat Singh and he turned from the crowded bazar towards a flower stall

But I saw a ring of people crowding around a juggler, who was waving his small drum.

Chacha Charat Singh became busy choosing a garland of marigold flowers.

I went astride and ran towards the juggler's ring.

I struggled between the legs of the people, got into the rounder, and saw the monkey husband beating his monkey wife. The juggler enacted the family quarrel. I heard the echoes of the quarrel between father and mother. The other people must also have been reminded of the same quarrel in their own families. So everyone laughed.

I turned to Chacha Charat Singh.

And he was not there.

I ran to look for him by the flower stall. He was not there.

I began to sob and called out: 'Chachaji! Chachaji!

No Chacha anywhere.

I was in a panic.

I drifted towards the shrine, weeping, sobbing and crying: 'Chachaji.'

The groups of women and men and children were busy eating. They looked at me, but then turned towards each other with raised questioning eyes.

I ran hither and thither.

Then I went to the shrine, thinking Chacha

Charat Singh may have gone to the temple to put the garland on Shiva.

I tried to look in, but the shrine was crowded. I stopped to stare at faces to see if I could recognise Chacha Charat Singh among the worshippers.

All the faces were different.

And I stood sobbing with my hoarse throat. Tears rolled down my face.

From behind the shrine came a Sadhu and picked me up.

I struggled to get out of his hands and to be put down, because I had been told by mother and father that Sadhus often took children away and sacrificed them to the mother goddess.

As I ran away from the stranger, I suddenly remembered that we had come from Nadaun in a boat, and the boat was on the river-side tied to a boulder.

I ran towards that spot. Sweating, tearstricken and lost, I fell on the stones on the way and found my foot bleeding. The sight of blood made me weep the more. And I got up still weeping, but went bravely towards the boat.

I sighted it. There was no one there.

Soon, however, one of the boatmen, who was smoking a hookah under the shade of a tree,

came and picked me up.

He consoled me by caressing my head. He wiped my sweat with his tunic. And he made me lie down on a mat. He offered me a big chapatti with dal. I was hungry. I devoured the food.

Then I cried again: 'Chachaji! Chachaji! Where are you?'

I was exhausted and the boatman patted me to sleep.

When I woke up I found myself in the lap of Chacha Charat Singh in a bullock cart going towards Nadaun, in the cool of the evening.

Inspite of the jolts, I slept all the way through.

I recalled the next morning that Prithipal Singh had said he would try to borrow the double barrelled Gun of the Raja of Nadaun and take me to hunt. So to the hunt I must go.

So, after he had said his prayers seated by a Brahmin priest on the river-side near the bridge, and Jayaram, Bansi had their Swin, and I my dip, I caught Chacha Prithipal Singh when he was smiling at the prophecies of the Brahmin and said:

'Chachaji-how about borrowing that double barrelled gun from the Raja Sahab?'

'Son!' he exclaimed. Then he shook his

head negatively and positively at the same time and smiled, adding: 'All depends on his mood.'

It so happened that on the way home, Prithipal Singh took us on the road by the palace, as he wanted to tell the Gurkha watchman, he would be late coming on duty, just in case Raja Sahab might ask.

Raja Sahab happened to be plucking flowers in the garden nearby and called out:

'Ohe Prithi Singha! you did not take me to the Kaleshwar Mela. You folks are selfish. Going there on your own. But did Babu Lal Chand's son enjoy the Mela?'

Prithi Singh was humble and sheepishly joined hands to the Raja.

'Raja Sahab-my name is Mulk Raj. I was named Bully by Owen Sahab. But mother calls me Mulky.'

'I will call you Bully. If you get a little more fat on you, you will look like a bulldog...'

'Our Doctor Balmukund said: 'If I go to Kangra Valley, I will become stronger. Now I feel strong after the few days here. But if Chacha Charat Singh takes me to hunt, I will be more strong. I know how to shoot, as I have learnt from Holdar Lachman Singh on the Chandmari...'

‘Acha-we will take you to the hunt...Prithvi Singh-ask the Syce Ram Dhun to hire ponies for all the boys. And we will go to hunt in the afternoon...’

We all joined hands to him.

I was jubilant.

‘So things have a way of working out!’ said Prithi Singh. ‘He must have heard of the Raj Kumar’s rudeness to the big Babu’s son.’

When we came home, Chacha Prithi Singh told the story of our good fortune in meeting the Raja and his promise to lend his gun to him.

‘Good thing!’ said Holdar Charat Singh. ‘Raja Sahab should know that if I am to be exalted from Holdar to Jamadar and then Subedar, it is all in the hands of Babu Lal Chand, who is the shadow Karmel Sahab of 38th Dogras. If we treat this boy well, I might get both your sons into the paltan. And, to be sure, Babuji will get for Raj Kumar the Badshah’s Commission direct-to be Laften and to be sent to Vilayat for training...’

In the late afternoon, Syce Ram Dhun came with three small ponies for myself,

Jayaram and Bansi Lal, and two mules for the two elders.

‘You are to join Raja Sahab in the jungle preserve,’ the Syce said. ‘He and Raj Kumar have already gone there.’

I was helped by the Syce to the brightest brown pony, but Ram Dhun kept the reins in his hands. The others helped themselves.

And off we went, beyond the village, past low purple hills, to a dense jungle of bamboo bushes, big banyan trees and mango groves and Neem trees and kikaras.

Raja Sahab, so we were told by a caretaker of the hunting lodge in the wooden bungalow, had already gone to round up the prey.

Ram Dhun led us into the jungle.

Before we had gone half a mile, we heard a shot ring through the still sweet cool air.

‘He may have shot a wild boar,’ the Syce said. ‘From the Machan.’

‘What is Machan?’ I asked him.

‘House on stilts! Raja Sahab can see the beast, as it comes to eat the goat or the rabbit he ties in front.

‘To be sure, the Raja Sahab had shot a big pig,’ Chacha Prithi Singh said as he shushed us

and called us up to the Machan.

I was highly excited by the exalted situation of the royal platform, the Raja's person dressed now in English shirt and breeches, with riding boots and sola topee on his head, the Raj Kumar, Jai Singh, by him in similar outfit, only cut to his small size. The polished double barrel gun would, however, be too heavy for me. And I did not know whether the snooty Raj Kumar would lend me his miniature single barrelled gun.

'I have sent the beaters to round up the stags,' Raja Sahab said. 'Sit down quietly. The grass has been put there...' 'Oh Jay Singhe! Lend Bully your gun. He has learnt marksmanship from the sepoy on the Chandmari...' 'And Lat us see what he has learnt.'

Raj Kumar Jay Singh gave me his gun.

As I was small, Holdar Charat Singh had to hold my arms to lift them to get the gun into position.

'The Lat Sahab's Mem learnt the same way,' Raja Sahab said. 'But-look-there is a stag and some deer... Take aim and shoot as soon as they begin to eat the grass.'

Holdar Charat Singh helped me.

As soon as the stag lowered his head, the Raja Sahab waved his head to Charat Singh and me.

I closed my left eye and, feeling like a mature marksman, took aim and shot at the stag.

But the stag had sensed our movement and turned away, revealing three deer and a little one behind.

I had killed the little one.

The baby deer fell, its white spots glistening above the brown skin in the sun.

‘Shabash! A good beginning!’ said the Raja Sahab.

I saw the blood spurting from the little deer’s belly and recalled how the blood had flowed from my head when I had fainted. The little deer had died.

My heart beat fast. I left the gun in the hands of Holdar Charat Singh. I wanted to weep. But my pride would not let me. I saw the little deer again and tears came to my eyes. And I began to sob.

‘Ohe weakling!’ the Raja Sahab said. ‘After all you are the son of a pen-pusher and not of a Rajput hero... Prithi Singh, take him to the lodge and give him some hot milk from the flask.’

Sheepishly, with head hung down in shame, but broken hearted about killing the little deer, I descended from the Machan with the help of Holdar Charat Singh.

‘You can certainly shoot straight, son, but you have been weakened by your illness,’ my mentor consoled me.

I had fever for the rest of my stay in Nadaun. The Raja Sahab came to see me with a Hakeem, who gave me some powder. And though I was afraid that the Hakeem was not a Doctor and may make me more unwell, I recovered. Holdar Charat Singh took me back to Nowshera, the way we had come.

I was never to forget the lovely Kangra Valley, at the foot of the high snow covered Daula Dhar above, with its mango groves and wild flowers of many colours, and purple round stones, by neat slate covered houses in the valley. I decided in my secret mind that I would insist on being sent there every vacation.

I did not quite believe in the fable of God Shiva sitting on top of the Daula Dhar, with his spouse Parvati lying down in his lap. But I wanted to believe in it. Because it brought the

breath of the age of the Gods, Satyug, which my mother always talked about, which had preceded the age of evil, Kali Yug, before my eyes in blurs. Our ancestors, then, were not servants of the Sahabs, but heroes like Raja Rasalu, who had defeated the demons.

On getting home, I went straight to mother, put my arms around her neck from behind, and said:

‘Oh Ma! What wonders there are in Kangra! Daula Dhar Pahar! Beas River! And flowers! Oh so many flowers! And I have brought enough Am Papad for you to put into the Oh Kuch box, to give us every day for the year. Only I must have double portion.’

SECTION 13

I hear rumours of the war breaking out

When I came back from Kangra Valley, I found that mother had again tied the scarf on her head.

I did not know the reason for this headache. But after seeing how the women in Nadaun were kept behind purdah and were made to do all the work at home and in the fields, I vaguely sensed that not only my mother, but all mothers, daughters, sisters, were having headaches every now and then.

No Dogra officer brought his wife to the cantonment. I was told there was an order from the Sarkar prohibiting the bringing of wives. Only father and the Quarter Master clerk, Babu Chattar Singh, were favoured and given officer's quarters as a special favour. And the handsmen, cooks, washermen, water carriers and sweepers were given small rooms with verandahs in the follower's lane, to house their families. In each house, the man was all in all. The women seldom appeared in the open. Mother and Chachi Gurdevi and Chachi Rukmani drew the head apron over their foreheads everytime father appeared. The mother of Ali and other Muslim women, like the wife of Holdar Maula Bux, wore

burqahs when they went out. Even the Christian women, Mrs. Jones, the band master's wife, Clayton's mother and Jimmie's wife, wore scarves on their heads, and walked behind their men. The washerwomen Gulabo was brazen and did not hide her face. Therefore the rumour was that she was a bad woman. The sister of Bakha, Sohini, was to be married off before she was eleven to a sweeper boy in the Afsar's Mescot. But because she had been teased by the priest of the temple, the boy's father was not happy, as though it was Sohini's fault that the Brahmin tried to embrace her. The threshold of the house was not to be crossed by women is the God-King Rama's wife, Sita, because she went beyond the line drawn by her husband, Ravana, and the demon King of Lanka, took her away.

Another thing I noticed by the time I was seven was that there were superiors and inferiors all round me. The outcastes were the lowest low untouchables. In spite of the stigma of once having been followers of the Aga Khan, father had risen to be head of the Nowshera branch of the Arya Samaj Brahmins, who uttered words inspired by the Gods. And though our family belonged to the Thathiar coppersmith

brotherhood, who were all born Khatris, originally the second highest caste after the learned Brahmins, we were considered somewhat inferior in caste, because the Thathiars did dirty work and wore soiled clothes.

The Dogras, being descended from Rajput warrior had higher status than the non-fighting Khatris. But, as they were mostly illiterate, and could not recite the holy verses like father, they accepted him as a Khatri exalted to the status of a Brahmin, through his position in the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj said that people could rise to higher caste by their good works. I guessed some of these things, by surmising the meaning of rough words spoken by elders in their gossip about each other. "Oh so and so is of low caste!" "What do you expect from a menial?" "The Mussalmans and Christians are converts from the outcastes! They are filthy and never wash!" And in my dimly growing mind, I understood the meaning of certain customs from the familiar words used to explain their lot: "Kismet!"

Apart from our superior status, because of the Khatri caste of father, and his Arya Samaj connection, he was also exalted, because the Sahabs favoured him most of all in the regiment,

and he was known as "Shadow Karnel Sahab." To be sure, he belonged to the new exalted order which the Ferungi Sahabs had made in Hindustan. Their Maharaja, George Panjam, and his Maharani, Mary, were on top. Lat Hardinge Sahab, Viceroy-i-Hind, was below them. The biggest Jarnel, the Commander-in-chief, said the Subedars were like Rama's monkey Jarnel Hanuman. And all the afsars, Sargents and Tommies belonged to the Gora monkey Foj, which had conquered Hindustan, as Hanuman's monkey army conquered Lanka. Thus the Sahabs were all Sarkar-i-alia, superior to all Indians, whether Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. Their pink white skin, mother said, made them look like lepers. But the Ferungis, specially the angrez Sargents, abused the sepoys, the followers and bazar folk, as 'black men who shit on ground.' And all the brown Subedars, Jemadars, Holdars, merchants in the bazar, contractors, and many Pathans accepted the exalted status of the Sahabs, who shat in commodes, chiefly because they had machine guns and big guns like Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Damdama and marched left right! left right! in good order.

Everyone knew the fate of all Indians was in the hands of Sahabs. And the legend was that

they decided whom to promote and whom not to promote, whom to give land in the new canal colony in Lyallpur, and whom not to give land. It was rumoured that, as the Goras ate their food with knives and forks, while we 'natus' ate with fingers, they were clean and we were dirty. Moreover, the Ferungis all wore shirts, shorts, kot patloons, neckties, boots and sola topees, while the 'Natus' wore Kurta-pyjama, or salwar, tunic, dhoti and handmade shoes. The neat fine line of the shirts, shorts, trousers and the strong boots of Sahabs, were supposed to be superior. The sola topee was considered more dignified than the turban or cap. And as most of the grasscutters wore only singlets and loin cloths, the Tommies considered these semi-naked people to be 'natus.'

The Sahabs therefore set the fashion. And the few 'Natus' who aspired to exalted status, wore suits, boots and hats, like most of the Sahabs and Christians. Everyone who had some money to spare tried first to have a good coat sewn.

Sepoys were ordered never to appear in dhoties, semi-naked, like 'junglies.'

Next to the Sahabs in greatness, so Clayton told me, were the Rajas, Maharajas, Nawabs

and Sardars, who had ruled the land before the Ferungis came, but who had been reduced by the white Sahabs to second status after themselves. Some Dogra Afsars mentioned to father, when they asked for promotion, that they were near relations of the family of the Raja of Nadaun, or Lambagraon, or Chamba or Suket, or Jammu. And thus they claimed superior status. But father mocked at them by repeating in Persian words: '*Pidar-i-man Sultanhood!*' (My father was a Sultan!)

I had already begun to notice that the rich contractors and cloth merchants, like our adopted uncles in the Sadar Bazar, Station Master, Schoolmasters and small Afsars, like Master Din Gul, were lower in the esteem of the Sahabs. The cooks, the bearers, the orderly, the sepoy, the workmen, the peasants, the tongawallas, the sweepers, the water carriers, and all those who wore soiled or scanty clothes, who ate betel leaf and spat ed liquid on corners, were low, servants, who had to do the dirty work, because they were illiterate, came from nowhere, and were crude and ugly folk.

As I liked Clayton's mother, Jimmy's daughter, Helen, Ali's mother, who gave me a mutton bone or hard boiled egg, and Bakha who

had saved my life, I secretly defied the contempts, which father and mother shared with the Sahabs and the upper folk. And though I prided myself on being called Pilpali Sahab, and wanted to wear a sola topee when I grew up, and even aspired to go to Vilayat, where the Sahabs came from, I felt somewhat guilty that I could only have affection for the lower people in my heart and not openly say, even to mother, that I was fond of them. Often, I aspired to visit the house of Mr. Jones, the Band Master, because he was sallow-skinned, not quite like a Pucca Sahab and not brown like us Indians. Father said he was 'Anglo-Indian', 'inferior to the Sahabs, but superior to the Natus.' His father was said to have been a Tommy Sergeant and his mother an Ayah.' I wanted to be like him. And yet I was not sure, because the Sahabs did not call him to the Mescot for dinner, and he felt too exalted to eat with the Indian Christians. This uneasy position always made his face the mask of a frown.

In our own family there was our own Lat Sahab, father, who gave headaches to mother and whose permission we children had to take before going anywhere, before doing anything, and before thinking a thought. And his decisions were final.

Sometimes, when he had time to indulge us, I wanted to ask him why mother had headaches. But, knowing that the headaches came often when he went to Amritsar alone, or to Peshawar, I felt that he would be angry with my impertinent questions.

And so, to escape from all those feelings, I clung to mother, following her wherever she went from kitchen to verandah, to courtyard and then inside the big room. Or I would sit by her in the courtyard as she plied the spinning wheel, 'eating the fresh air,' she said, and 'tasting the sun.' I myself felt happy in the warm sun—light outside, than in the cold dark of the rooms of our house in winter. Even though the sun was often strong and made me feel hot, I liked the brightness it brought. And I made father recite the *Gayatri* hymn to the Sun. I did not understand the meaning of the words, but liked the sound.

As she did not want me to cling to her, she would put me to work, shelling the peas, or taking the stones and straws out of the lentils, or to make puffs of cotton on the comb which she would afterwards spin.

And, now and then, she would tell me a fairy tale or more stories about the jinns and bhoots, who were said to appear in the dark, specially by the graveyards and cremation grounds and in the jungles. To her everything had a spirit—a tree, a bird, a dog, a sparrow. But father said there were higher spirits and lower spirits. To me the spirits were all frightening ghosts, who could make you mad if they possessed you. I had seen a grasscutter's wife, shrieking and weeping and babbling, being led to the river Lunda and dipped in the water to be rid of the jinn who was said to possess her. If I asked what the spirits looked like, mother would point to the sky and show me monstrous forms of clouds, where I could often see certain wooly apparitions of large potbellied demons, fakirs with big white beards, and the big God with the big beard. In her talks with Gurdevi and Rukmani, she often described the punishment which Yama, the God of death and his demons, would give to drunkards like my uncle Piaru, loose women like my aunt Devaki, and stubborn daughters-in-law like Draupadi, as also to father if he indeed went to Bazar. She would ask me to go away and not overhear the tales of horror about the Rakshas of Yama, who had horns like

bulls on their heads, bodies of wrestlers, maces in their hands, and who were said to strike sinners and crack their skulls, then float the bodies in the seas of blood, where crocoiles, sharks and tortoises devoured them. And some sinners, she said, would be driven into the forests naked, and be eaten up by lions and tigers, or trampled underfoot by elephants. The flesh of the sinners would be eaten by jackals, wild dogs and foxes. And lakhs of ants could gather and gnaw on their bones.

These stories of hell would be told by each of the three 'sisters of the spinning wheel' when they were unhappy, through some trouble at home. Mother foretold that the end of the world was imminent, everytime she tied the scarf on her head to control her headache.

And when she was in great distress through father having gone away for some days to Peshawar or Amritsar, she would sit before the Mandala of her Gods, for longer periods, telling the beads of the rosary with eyes closed. Then I would steal out of the house and go to the follower's lane, where Holdar Maula Bux, Mr. Jimmy, or Clayton were sitting in the nimble sunshine of afternoon, and playing a game with pebbles. And as they gave me some roasted gram

or monkey nuts, and let me watch their play, I felt happier here than at home. They wore dirty cloths, were unkempt, and poor, but said they didn't care for any '*Iunda Lat*', specially Mr. Jones, the band Master Sahab, who never condescended to join them or talk to them, though he could not call the Gora Sergeants home because the Tommies were pucca Sahabs, while the bandsmen and followers in whose lane he lived were 'natus'.

As my truancies were infrequent, and mother talked again and again about the Rakshas of hell, about ghosts with long beards, and witches whose feet were turned backwards, though their hands were stretched outwards, I had nightmares and cried in my sleep at nights until mother hugged me and patted me to sleep.

Even during daytime, riding on the bar of the bicycle, on the way back from school, with Clayton my guardian protectively bending on me as he drove the bicycle, I dared not look this side or that, towards the lush berry trees by the railway bridge near which was the grave of the Muslim Pir with a green flag on it. Before I had heard mother's stories of jinns and bhoots, I had gone freely with the other boys and plucked berries or received them from someone who

play with those low boys,' I hoped one day to be big enough to share their games and wild adventures. They seemed to me to be children of the Sun and earth, like the boys in Daska village or in Kangra, or Nowshera bazar—outcastes, but happy in the dust and the heat and the scum.

I asked father who were the pure spirits.

He told me that in our Vedas, there were the Gods who gave life. The big God Brahma had created the world when he was playing about with clay and made images of man and woman and he had breathed life into the images and so the world began. The God Surya gave light. The Goddess Usha came in the dawn with a smile to make us all happy. Indra was the God of thunder, who brought rain. Varuna was the sky, which was always soft blue and beneficent. The stars were all flying spirits, who leaped with joy.

'You must learn all the hymns in praise of the Gods in our Vedas when you grow up,' father said. 'There are also good mantras with which to scatter all the jinns and bhoots of the dark.'

I loved him when he talked this and understood why he liked Chachi Devaki more than mother, because my aunt smiled and was

plucked them. Now I would look straight ahead into the glare and quiver inside me, for fear the Pir's ghost, would emerge and kill Clayton and take me into the grave for the sacrilege of passing by his tomb, which was holy space, the property of his ghost. I did not tell anyone about these terrors.

But when I was heard shrieking at night suddenly, through a bad dream, father shouted at me, then picked me up and put me by him in his bed and stroked me to sleep again.

And when, on waking up, he asked me what had happened to frighten me, I told him that mother had told me of jinns and bhoots who would punish all those who sinned.

'But you are innocent-what sin can you commit! Your mother is a fool to talk to you boys of the low spirits. She should tell you of the pure spirits!

I realised that so far I had committed no sin. Only once I had lied that my brother Des had thrown my shoes in the river, because I wanted mother's sympathy, to get more sweets from the 'Oh Kuch box.'

And though I saw Chotta, Ali and Ram Charan, playing Khutti some way away, but could't join them from father's injunction 'not to

happy go lucky, while mother tied the scarf on her head every now and then and sulked.

So when he made Brute and me recite two or three lines of the Gayatri Hymn, facing the sun in the early morning, I was less afraid all day.

But mother heard all this and wryly commented.

‘No hymn recitations will bring mercy from God to those who drink liquor. For their bad deeds they will be born as bullocks, donkeys and camels.’

In secret, then, I brooded on the terrors of being born as a donkey because all donkeys I saw, were beaten. And I was terrified at the prospect of the closing of eyes which had happened to my brother Prithvi. This would bring punishment to Prithvi from Yama and his demons. I wondered what bad thing Prithvi had become after he passed away. But he had done no bad deeds. He had died perhaps because I would not let him drink all mother’s milk. Then I would be a donkey for my sin in denying him mother’s milk. Not Prithvi.

As I always remembered the story mother had told me that our grandmother could not die, though she was in pain, until she asked for a cat and breathed her soul into its mewling mouth, I

brooded often about grandma's ghost without telling anyone.

And when Pandit Kali Charan's wife came to eat sweet rice and milk kheer in the verandah of our house, on the death anniversary of our grandmother, I stole glances at the Brahmin's wife's face, to see how much she resembled my idea of father's mother, as a wrinkled old woman. Kali Charan's wife, though old, was not wrinkled. All the same, I fancied the ghost of grandma had come into her and was eating the food greedily, using five fingers of her right hand, which I had been told by father was an ugly thing to do. I recalled the face of the Brahmin priest who had been feasted by Holdar Charat Singh to appease the spirit of his father. But that was a happy feast, because the old man had died at ninety years of age.

Because ghosts were supposed to appear in the dark, I became more and more frightened of the nights and would not go out to the latrine to piss. So a pisspot had to be brought from the hospital from Dr. Balmukund, for me to urinate into before going to bed, or if I woke up during the night.

Unfortunately, the dread of the spirits became imbedded in me, from my nearness to

my brooding mother, through father's distance from us children, and because I was not allowed to play with the rough boys. And I began to wet the bed through fear of some demon with a mace, or of a witch with her feet turned back, dishevelled hair and toothless mouth.

In those days, the happy times were when father picked me up in his arms and sang:

'Bully my son

Bully my pig

Bully my son, son...'

I then played merrily with my toys. And when father came back from office, I recited tables to him as in the first years of my childhood. And I was all smiles, singing each word and running, capering, jumping, somersaulting and pulling my little brother Hem's looli, as he crawled about in the courtyard of our house. And I asked for a bigger share of sweets and dry fruit from mother when she opened the 'Oh kuch' box. And I wandered out into the sunny land by the gym, looking for bright pebbles and colourful stones and soft earth to put on my wooden board on which I, like other children,

wrote the dictation at school. I liked the smell and taste of the soft 'gachni' earth so much that I ate it in secret, in spite of mother's warning that I would be ill with it.

I did not know, then, why I wanted to be happy at all costs. and while I waited for father to come in the afternoon from office and sing the song, 'Bully! Bully! Bully my son...' I also pretended, sometimes, that I was having a nightmare, so that mother might put me next to her in bed.

Maybe the instinct to play had come back, from the propulsion of the wish to be happy, as I regained strength of body, after having been near death. And there was enough affection left from my self-love in the struggle for survival, to show off to others in order to get from them praise for my cleverness by boasting to visitors! I longed for Mama Dayal Singh to come back and say 'love, love, love,' which he did all the time as he touched the beads of his rosary.

My memory of father bearing me all the way to the hospital after the accident, had also wiped out all mother's insinuations against him. And I now wanted to grow up to be like him. I wanted to play cricket as he had played this game at school, from the photo of him as Kaptan

seated by the team of C.M.S. High School, Amritsar. I wanted to learn to be referee at hockey matches, as I was too small to be a member of a team. I wanted to speak Angrezi as fluently as he did to the Sahabs.

In those days after convalescence, then, I recall, I wanted to grow up to be a sunny child. I would offer to recite the poem 'in the morning when my eyes opened and I saw the dew,' from my school book to every corner. I wanted to be quicksilver like Nurse Rose. I capered like a young colt but did not walk. I sang but did not talk. Or I chapar chapared without a stop in Angrezi speech to be a Sahab. And if someone asked me whether I had recovered from the wound on my head, I said I was Raja Rasalu who got wounded in battle often, but applied a magic potion and recovered to fight again. I insisted on Clayton teaching me how to play the flute. And I felt it should always be a radiant morning. And no sulks between mother and father, between mother and Devaki, between mother and her daughter-in-law Draupadi.

In those days, I had the hunch that sharp words, abuse and punishment, were not because we did not docilely accept don'ts, but because the elders were big and we were small. And they were tense from angers, burnings and sufferings unknown to us innocents, who did not know that was going on in the world of grownups.

In those days I could not understand things, through thoughts. I could only sense things. So I could feel my body rushing out in search of the pleasure of play at the touch of the morning sun, as a spark shooting out of a fire.

I recognised myself as a spark, because I had been called a 'Nutfa' (spark) by others.

And I had the instinct that I was akin to all the children who wanted to play—even to Ram Charan, who had accidentally hit me with a stone meant to hit someone else.

'Touched by the Sun!' father said to Subedar Major Garka Singh when he saw me singing to myself as I ran out without joining hands to uncle. 'Gone mad. Perhaps the blow on his head has unhinged him...'

I felt in my wild rush that if I had stood and paid respects to this big uncle, this would have interrupted the rhythm of my caper.

But when I came back and showed my father's numbria, a violet I had plucked from the crevice of a big boulder, Subedar Sahab said: 'You must come for a walk with me in the Swat hills, beyond the dry river bed of the Kassi...When I was your age, I was a jungli and used to go with the roughs of the village of Sujanpur Tira to gather mushrooms for my mother...'

'Only there are Pathan kidnappers in the Swat hills,' father said.

I recalled my visit to Nadaun and felt if I had not been weakened by the illness, following the wound on my head, I would have ventured out with Bansilal and Jayaram, nephews of Holdar Charat Singh, to the hills to go and pluck wild flowers. I decided I must go back to Kangra valley somehow or the other.

The summer vacations from school had begun and I hoped some Holdar would offer to

take me to the Valley below the Daula Dhar. As the fantasy may not be realised, I would repeat the tables, or some English lesson aloud. Bored, I told father when he came back from office. I wanted to become 'a juggler's monkey.'

'But you are already a monkey!' he said, smiling at my impetuousity.

He said this because I imitated, without being asked to, Mister Jones conducting the regimental band with father's ruler for a baton. And then I repeated the Gora Sergeant order ordering 'Lef-right!' 'Lef-right!' 'Stand at ease!' 'Shun!' I could also show father how Holdar Surjan Singh let loose wind.

I even mimicked myself asking questions: 'Why is the sky blue?' 'Why does not the river run backward?' 'Why are the Sahabs pink and we brown?' And, slightly frightened that father may be angry, I would repeat in a whisper what he said in a shoutd 'Chup! Ohe budmash!' And this brought laughter from Clayton, and a smile even from father, adding the extra courage of the foolhardy to the cocoon of myself-intoxication.

My imitation of Bakha weeping the road in the bazar, saying, 'Posh! Posh!' 'Sweeper coming!' seemed to amuse father. And he asked

mother, every time my hero came to give him some sweets from the 'Oh kuch' box.

In those days, I began to combine the egoism of the child wanting satisfaction from every wish with a kind of reasoning which was instinctive cunning.

I realised this during one of mother's sulks.

It was the third day after mother had tied the scarf round her head, since father returned from Peshawar. And I had the hunch that they were 'kutto', with each other. The silence of gloom spread over the house.

As he lay reading the *Civil and Military Gazette* in his shadow Karmel's armchair, his face was an even scowl

I ventured to say:

'Baji—are you kutto with mother?'

'Han—nahin!' he said, both accepting and denying the quarrel.

Later, when mother put his thali of food before him with a thrust and not a slide, I noticed that her restrained anger had burst out, in spite of her wish not to show Brute and me, sitting by

father, that she was sulking. Her face was reddish brown with the heat of the wood fire of the Chullah on which she was baking chapatis. And father swallowed morsels without munching.

Brute's head was bent.

I raised my head and said: 'Mother, you are burning the chapati!'

She immediately withdrew the chapati from the fire with the chimta tongs.

'Why don't you say something, Brute?' I taunted my docile elder brother.

He did not respond.

I could not sleep well during the night. Mother pressed me to her to feel me restless, and she sobbed with the end of sheet over her mouth.

The next morning, as father was bathing me, I said:

'Water is cool—I feel good bathing now that it is warm weather.'

'Han, son, you must bathe twice-a-day in summer.'

'If you will also. Perhaps you will bathe three times...'

'Why?'

'Because you will be less angry.'

‘Then your mother should bathe four times.’

‘Mother,’ I shouted. ‘Father says you should bathe four times a day.’

‘Bath is to purify dirty bodies and souls,’ she said. And she lifted her head in the direction of father.

‘Come, come, mad woman!’ father mocked at her.

‘You are mad,’ she said ‘to go to—’

‘Acha! Acha! Don’t buk!’ And he whispered to me: ‘Go take this dupatta I have brought for her.’

I took the dupatta for her.

She smiled a suppressed smile. Then she began to sob.

‘You are mad, to go to —’

‘Acha! Acha!’ he silenced her.

‘Give the children the sweets I have brought. And give me one.’

When she gave it to him, he bit a portion and gave me the half to give to her.

Solemnity disappeared from the house for some days after this.

I thought of their broken sentences and secretive manner and guessed that father was

always lying to mother. He dared not tell her he went to bazar women to hear songs and see dance.

But by doing 'no kutto' to each of them, I had reconciled them for a while.

'Don't be impertinent!' father would often say when, from my sense of the reasons behind the angers, fears and doubts of the elders, I would come out with some home truth.

For instance, I said, one day, when father's numbria Holdar Surjan Singh Quarter Master Holdar complained about Babu Charat Singh not passing his bills: 'Contractors offer you and us baskets of fruit, but not to Chacha Charat Singh—that is why he is against you.'

Both the Numbrias smiled.

'How do you know all this?' Holdar Surjan Singh said. 'You are a baby.'

'No, I said, I am a big boy now.'

How old?

'Nine!'

They laughed.

'Acha, go and read that picture book I brought you,' father said.

I went to the verandah and began to play teaching Biti A.B.C.

He repeated the alphabet. Then, as I tried to teach him 'Good Morning,' etc. he began to cry. And I smacked his bottom, as mother sometimes smacked mine. He howled,

Mother came to punish me. I was cunning and ran away.

My familiar cry was: 'I want! I want! I want!

From Khansama Fakhru I wanted a cake. From Mali Illm Din I wanted a carrot. From mother I wanted 'Oh kuch.' From father I wanted praise.

The 'I want' cry was continuous. I must be satisfied. The more I was frustrated the more I said: 'I want'.

And I mouthed, 'Why? Why? Why?' all the time.

And secretly, I was converting every wish into a stubborn self-will.

My ego, bigger than my small body, would not admit 'No. I wanted everything to be contained in the cocoon of my own volatile energy.

I have often wondered in later years if the

bluff and bluster and again of my maturity was not rooted in the spark that I was as a child.

The sensational news shattered my ego-centric world.

I had gone with Clayton to the Afsar' Mescot to get a puppy which the Khansamah had promised to give me to play with, as I had no other companion.

As we reached the office, Clayton went in to receive orders from father. He soon came out and said.

'Chotta Bhai, something terrible has happened in Vilayat! I must take you back home.'

'What has happened?'

'Jung!' he said. 'Karnel Sahab's orderly told me Sahab says 'jung chir gaya!' Vilayati Badshah Jarj will fight his German cousin brother Kaiser.'

On the way, there were groups of sepoys whispering to each other. They hailed Clayton, but he did not stop.

But he made a detour of the follower's lane.

There, the boys were shouting: 'Jung! Jung! Jung chir gaya!'

For the first time I saw Mr. Jones, the Anglo-Indian Band Master, standing with Holdar Maula Bux, Jimmi, Ali's father Abdulla, armourer, Shamas Din, Tailor Master Ramzan. All had anxious faces.

'Clayton—what's exactly happened?' asked Mr. Jones.

'Jung chir gaya!' Clayton confirmed.

'Toba! Toba!' cried out Holdar Maula Bux and went into his quarter.

And, from inside his house, came wails of women.

Clayton brought me home on the bar of the cycle.

'Ma-ji, I must rush back,' he said to mother. Babuji will be waiting for me. Our Sahabs have declared war against Girmans.'

'Hai! Hai! Eater of their masters!' mother said. 'Always fighting. These lepers!'...They are going to fight Mahabharat again. Pandus-Kurus. But there is no God Krishna to help the Pandus now in the Kalyug.'

'He who has better guns will win. Also he whose foj is a better machine...Our sepoy will freeze in the cold...Babuji is not supposed to fight... So he will not be asked to go...But our

paltan will have to go...And I am a bandsman. May be, I will revert back to the flute.

I began to cry.

'Kaka, I am there with you children,' mother said.

Clayton cycled away.

When father came late in the evening, his face was a scowl. He washed his hands and face after tatto. But he remained silent. There were lines on his forehead. He said to mother: 'Give me milk quickly-I have to go back to daftar!'

'Is there some bad news?' Mother asked.

'Angrezi Sarkar has quarrelled with their brothers, the Germans...We will have to go to Amritsar to leave Des and Mulky. And then we will take Hem and go to the depot in Malakund Fort in Chitral beyond Peshawar town. Paltan is going to Vilayat...'

Now I uttered a shriek and fell down sobbing 'Hai! Ma!' I don't want to go from Nowshera!'

Des also rubbed his eyes.

Hem was asleep.

‘Chup ohe—your father has not yet died!’ father said to me ‘I have always told you to leave this service!’ mother said!

Father got up and went out.

I still could not understand jung. I tried to invent what I could not comprehend. I could only imagine sepoy thrusting bayonets into germans, as they did into dummies of men made of straw-filled sacks. They would kill the enemies when the Sahabs would order them to do so.

I suddenly thought of one happy augury: I will be near my milk-and-honey aunt Devaki.

I stood silently by a pillar of the verandah, with the thumb of my left hand in my mouth. Only the sparrows chirped.

‘If the sepoy die will they go to heaven?’ I asked mother.

‘Nahin, son,’ she said. ‘To hell! God of death ‘Yama’ is ready to receive them all with his Rakshas...For the sin of killing others, who have done nothing bad to them. They don’t know who are the Germans. And why they are fighting them...’ They are going against our dharam.’

Until then, the dead body, though fearsome, because it had a ghost in it, had

seemed to me as though a person was perhaps asleep. Now I guessed that the dead sepoy, oozing blood, would become 'Kutto' from life forever, never to return except as ghosts to haunt me.

'Jung!'

I did not understand the reason for fighting with real bullets to kill others.

I had thought of Vilayat beyond the black waters as a happy landscape, where the palace of Jarj Panjam and Malika Mary was, where Subedar Major Garkha singh had been to say salaam to the king and to receive his medals. I could not think of London town as a big big graveyard ..

How shall I be able to go there if every one should die there? Why were the Sahabs fighting? They would probably shoot down the Germans as they had shot down the Pathans in Hoti Mardan. Were they really 'demons,' as mother said. 'Always fighting?'

I felt sad I would not be able to go to Vilayat if all the Sahabs there died in the jung that had begun.